

Vision 2017

THE list of choices for Egypt's top event in '96 is both varied and long. Some have been positive, such as Egyptian diplomacy's success in unifying the Arabs vis-a-vis the Israeli government's anti-peace policies. Others, however, fall under the category of bleak and tragic. Take, for example, the collapse of an apartment building in Helwan. This was a disaster which, in claiming the lives of 65 people, served as a shocking reminder of the high cost of corruption and laxity that has pervaded many facets of Egyptian life in past years.

These events were definitely milestones. But Al-Ahram Weekly's choice was more of a vision for the future — the announcement of two intimately related national projects. The first is the plan to break out of the narrow confines of the Nile Valley and, in President Hosny Mubarak's words, "to fan out, in a planned and organised manner, throughout the country". The second is the National Project to Develop Upper Egypt.

These two projects, by the very fact that they both express and require tremendous national will and determination, represent the pay-off or nearly two decades of economic and social metamorphosis. It is the beginning of the end of a period in which Egyptians have stoically borne the often-heavy cost of overhauling the country's tattered infrastructure and the implementation of the first stages of economic reform.

Described by Mubarak as "the project for the 21st Century," the plan to conquer Egypt's vast desert areas involves the construction of two major irrigation canals to Sinai and the Western Desert, thereby increasing the country's habitable land from 12.5 million feddans to 50 million feddans by the year 2017. Expansion, however, does not come cheap. The project will cost a staggering LE2,000 billion, or LE100 billion annually for the next 20 years.

The second scheme, the National Project for the Development of Upper Egypt, will be launched in 1997 and aims to correct the sharp developmental imbalance between the northern and southern parts of the country. Sporting an LE300 billion price tag over the next 20 years, the project will boost social services, income and job opportunities in Upper Egypt, a region that had, once upon a time, been the throne for Egypt's rulers.

"We have to prove to ourselves and to others that we are an innovating nation in an innovating world," said Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri this week.

In the photo (right), 12-year Safat, from the new Al-Gurna village near Luxor, is captured by Randa Shaath, as she embarks on her long daily trek to school, and a brighter future.



'The Arabs and I'

On the eve of a new year and his accession to the helm of the United Nations, Kofi Annan spoke to Gamal Nkrumah

"An effective secretary-general must get on with the 15 members of the Security Council, especially the permanent five — China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. But he must also be responsive to the other 170 members. I do not consider myself 'America's man', or 'Ghana's man', just 'the UN's man'. In the end, all 15 members of the council supported me and the General Assembly appointed me by acclamation. So I am pleased to say that I have 185 bosses, and I consider each of them important."

"If I do have the confidence of the US, so much the better. A principal goal of my tenure will be to restore the financial health of the UN, starting with an effort to get the US to pay its back dues. I think that is essential."

"An essential word to the Arab world, which I know quite well from a number of previous visits, especially my mission to Iraq: I am your secretary-general as much as anyone's. You have a friend and well-wisher in me, and one who has admired Arab culture and civilisation for many years."

"My first priority will be to build a team, because I can ac-

complish little without an effective team to work with. At the top of my agenda will be to work with member governments to build a consensus on what kind of UN they want in a post-Cold War world. I have no desire to debate this issue for five years. It is a question that should be answered in the first few months."

"Once this consensus is achieved, we will build on it. The secretariat can be restructured. A budget can be shaped to fund the new programmes. And we can get on with our work, confident that governments support the agenda."

Annan had kind words for the outgoing secretary-general. "Boutros Ghali is an extraordinary statesman who headed the UN through a truly turbulent period. I can only say that I believe history will record with gratitude his important contribution to this organisation and judge him more kindly, and more realistically, than some have done in recent months."

Annan stresses that America must pay its dues. "It is important that governments recognise the legally binding nature of their commitment to the UN. I believe that the US needs the UN as much as the UN needs the US. And I believe that great powers

sustain their greatness through sensitivity to the interests of other states. On the basis of these three ideas, I feel that the US must, should and most likely will pay what it owes to the UN."

Annan was in favour of expanding the Security Council's permanent members, but he gave no clue as to whom exactly the new permanent seats might go to. "The five permanent members of the council were the major victors in a war that ended 51 years ago. The Security Council was expanded once, in the early 1960s, from 11 to 15 members. I think that expansion is in order, and that the question of permanent seats should be reviewed, with all regions receiving their due importance."

Africa is uppermost in Annan's mind. "Africa must receive our undivided attention. Africa is a special place to me; my home and family are there. I can't help but feel a keen interest in its problems and I am eager to tackle them. But while the problems are great, the human and natural resources of the continent are also great. As government-based development assistance shrinks, we must look for non-governmental sources. African governments and societies must also become more self-reliant. We must not lose heart."

Subdued Xmas in Bethlehem

THOUSANDS of Palestinians and Christian pilgrims filled the 1,600-year-old Church of Nativity in Bethlehem yesterday, celebrating Christmas day in an atmosphere dampened by economic woes and a heavy security cordon set up by Palestinian and Israeli security forces. The second Christmas in Bethlehem under Palestinian rule was a far cry from 1995's raucous celebrations, when Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat made a triumphant appearance in the city, two days after the Israeli withdrawal.

Arafat observed the mid-night Mass from his seat of honour in the church with his wife Soha by his side, as children set off fire crackers in Manger Square, which was decorated with Christmas lights.

In an unusual political sermon, Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah criticised both Israel's tough measures against the Palestinians and religious leaders on both sides who foster extremism. Peace, he said, "cannot be achieved by roadblocks where people are humiliated, demolishing homes or confiscating lands to build Jewish settlements."

Hebron deal within days

Hopes are running high that an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians on the delayed withdrawal from Hebron is finally within reach

Palestinian and Israeli leaders moved closer to another landmark accord, boosting hopes for Middle East peace on Christmas Day. Progress at Tuesday's meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was made possible by an Israeli concession on a key issue. Negotiators pursued the talks in Jerusalem yesterday in the hope of striking a deal on Israel's long overdue withdrawal from Hebron, the last West Bank city under Israeli occupation.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said the Arafat-Netanyahu meeting had moved the two sides closer to an agreement. "Progress was made but it's still not enough," he said. "What we will try to do today [yesterday] is to bridge the gap which exists between us."

Palestinian security chief Jibril Rajoub, asked whether an agreement could be reached within a week, replied: "Sooner than that."

According to The Associated Press, Is-

rael made a key concession by dropping a demand that the agreement explicitly state that Israeli troops have the right to pursue Arab suspects into Palestinian-controlled areas of Hebron.

"The agreement is there. There are a few things to be straightened out," said Netanyahu's spokesman David Bar-Ilan, adding that Israel hoped for agreement "in the next few days."

Palestinian negotiators said remaining issues included details of a buffer zone between the area in Hebron where 500 Jewish settlers live, which will remain under Israeli control, and the rest of the city, which will be patrolled by Palestinian police.

A deal on Hebron — a city of 500 Jewish settlers and 130,000 Palestinians — would be the first major development in the peace process since Netanyahu was elected in May.

Israel was to have pulled out of Hebron in March but postponed the move after a series of suicide bombings in Israel. Ne-

tanyahu — who as opposition leader opposed the PLO-Israel peace process altogether — delayed the withdrawal further in hopes of improving security for the settlers.

Tuesday's summit, the third meeting between Arafat and Netanyahu since the Israeli leader's election, followed several days of intensive mediation by US special envoy Dennis Ross, who decided to stay in the region until an accord is finalised.

As Arafat and Netanyahu met at the Erez crossing between Israel and the autonomous Gaza Strip, President Hosni Mubarak received Israel's Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai at the Red Sea resort of Hurgada, reports Nivea Khalil. Following the talks, Mubarak said a Hebron deal would have a positive impact on Egyptian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli relations and would encourage Syria to resume negotiations with Israel. He said he was happy to hear reports that great progress had been made.

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Arab summit: top event of '96

Nine out of 14 public personalities polled by *Al-Ahram Weekly* rated last June's Cairo Arab summit and the regional economic cooperation conference, MENA III, held in October, as the most important events of 1996. Three believed the formation of Prime Minister Kamel El-Ganzouri's new cabinet was more significant and two found the collapse of the 12-storey building in Heliopolis, with the loss of 64 lives, the year's most momentous incident.

Parliament Speaker Fathi Sorour, like most personalities polled, rated the Arab summit as the most important event of 1996. "The Arabs stood their ground in the face of the negative Israeli policies," Sorour said, "and insisted on peace as a strategic goal." For Sorour, MENA III came second.

Kamel Zubeiri, former chairman of the Press Syndicate, believes that Egyptian diplomacy was at its most active this year, not only hosting three major international conferences — the Peacemakers' Summit in Sharm El-Sheikh, the Arab summit and MENA III — but also receiving in Cairo a number of world leaders like French President Jacques Chirac, Italy's Luigi Scalfaro and Chinese President Jiang Zemin. Zubeiri believes that the Arab summit "put a ceiling on Israel's interpretation of what peace should be like."

Abdel-Moneim Said, director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, said that 1996 was "not a year of big bangs," but that the Arab summit was the year's most important event because it was the first since 1990. "It was a clear sign of improved relations among the Arabs," he said.

The Arab summit was of great significance, concurred former Prime Minister Mustafa Khalil, "because for the first time the Arabs declared that peace was their strategic goal."

Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the leftist Tagammu Party, said that the Arab summit marked the first time that "Arab officials followed a strategy that is close to the will of their people." It also raised Egypt's status among the Arab states, he added.

Mustafa Kamel Murad, head of the Liberal Party, agreed that Egyptian diplomacy was "very successful and balanced" this year, saying that the Arab summit was the first time that Arab leaders agreed on a united strategy for peace.

The summit was "the only way of countering the new Israeli government," according to renowned cinema director Kamel El-Sheikh. Arab unity was vital in this crisis, he added, and "the Arabs must stand up as one nation."

Farkhonda Hassan, head of the Women's Committee of the ruling National Democratic Party, agreed that Egyptian diplomacy was highly successful in 1996, leading the "distinguished" performance of Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. She added that the Arab summit showed that "Egypt was the leader of peace in the region and is the only state which can bring the Arabs back together after

There were no big bangs in 1996, but a number of high-profile diplomatic events and the formation of a new cabinet, made headlines. Nevine Khalil seeks the views of a number of political and intellectual figures



Fathi Sorour



Mustafa Khalil



Kamel Zubeiri



Abdel-Moneim Said



Khaled Mohieddin



Kamel Murad



Yassin Serageddin



Samira Ahmed

a breakdown in relations."

And El-Sayed Rashed, head of the Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions, described the Arab summit as an "initiative to close the ranks of the Arab family."

But Mohamed Fadel, director of the box-office success *Nasser '56*, was dissatisfied with the Arab summit because he saw its deliberations as a "superficial show of Arab unity. There is still a lot of acrimony dividing many of the Arab leaders." The Arab states have not put up enough resistance to Israel, "which continues to act arrogantly and rudely," he said.

Fardos Abdel-Hamid, the veteran TV and cinema actress who played Gamal Abdel-Nasser's wife in *Nasser '56*, agreed, describing the Arab summit as "an attempt to unite the Arabs" that had produced no tangible results. "Netanyahu succeeded in revealing the true ugly face of Israel," she continued, "but the Arabs have received this very calmly and did not react."

Views were also mixed on the significance of MENA III. Rashed believes that MENA III "outlined the future economic course of action for both Egypt and the Arab world."

Yassin Serageddin, leader of the Wafd Party's parliamentary group, said that MENA III assumed importance "because of its political undertones." He added that the conference gave a boost to investment and the future development of Egypt.

Film director Ina'm Mohamed Ali, while voting the Arab summit the year's top event, underlining the importance of "unity among the Arabs in face of Netanyahu's headline policies, threats and rudeness," said that MENA III paved the way for such unity, "especially as Israel was marginalised during the conference." Ali added, however, that MENA III did not showcase Egypt well enough. "Three days was not enough time, and the contracts signed do not meet the requirements to rebuild our economy."

On the other hand, actress Samira Ahmed described MENA III as very successful because "the organisation, the discussions and the level of participation were very high."

Although the Tagammu's Mohieddin believes that it is still "too early to judge the benefits of the conference, and how much the Arabs can gain from it," the NDP's Hassan said that MENA III gave Egyptians confidence in their economy, with public

opinion showing support for the government's economic reform policy. Hassan continued that the new government, whose formation in January was rated as the second most important event of the year, paved the way for MENA III. She noted that the pace of reform was quicker this year, but was kept in check by social factors and the new government's policy of reducing taxes. "This year we saw the average Egyptian reaping the fruit of past reforms," she added.

Director El-Sheikh described MENA III as an important event which was "a clear reflection of what the government is trying to achieve for the Egyptian people." He added that Prime Minister Kamel El-Ganzouri's cabinet "surprised the public with its determination to deal with problems head on." The speed with which decisions were taken and reforms introduced was "an obvious indicator of the new government's aim to make Egypt investor-friendly."

Parliament Speaker Sorour believes that the new government heralded the beginning of a new era in Egypt's political, economic and social development. "Very different from the previous government," was the verdict of journalist Zubeiri on El-Ganzouri's cabinet. He said the new government "holds the reins tightly in its hands and appears determined to 'end corruption and bureaucracy and achieve set goals.'" Zubeiri described El-Ganzouri as a successful administrator, who is streamlining procedures within the government — "something which needs a strong, practical prime minister."

The Wafd's Serageddin agreed that El-Ganzouri is very different from his predecessor, Atef Sidki. He described the new prime minister as "very ambitious and an achiever, set on ending corruption and bureaucracy."

Film director Fadel took the same view. "The new government's philosophy is to deal with any issue with determination and very scrupulously," he said. The new government augurs well for Egypt's future, believes the Liberal Party's Murad, because it is working to reduce taxes and tariffs and encourage investments. "The weekly cabinet meetings on Wednesdays are very important to follow through on decisions," he said. He acknowledged the government's efforts to listen to the opposition, as shown in the prime minister's periodic meetings with political party leaders and journalists throughout the year. This was a new departure, he explained, "which aims at cementing the relationship

between the government and the opposition."

Al-Ahram's Said described the new government as "more daring" both in implementing economic reform and upholding civil rights. "Procedures are faster and the government has shown respect for the rulings of the Constitutional Court, an indicator of improved performance," he added.

But director Ali was more critical, saying that the only difference between the old and new cabinets was the change of prime minister. She was worried by the speed at which economic reform took place this year, saying that "more time should be taken to study the implications of reform and its effects on the social structure."

But the Trade Union Federation's Sayed Rashed was satisfied with the new government "because of its distinguished performance in planning, implementation and follow-up."

Actress Abdel-Hamid believes that the new prime minister "is trying to make a real difference on many levels." She said the new government's anti-corruption campaign has been very successful and rewarding, adding that "people are very comfortable with the new government's actions and its attempts to fight corruption." The collapse of the building in Heliopolis, she continued, was a clear example of the consequences of the corruption which the new government is trying to end.

The collapse of the 12-storey residential building in October and the torrential rains which hit Upper Egypt and South Sinai in November were also rated as top events of 1996. Like most of the people polled, Zubeiri believes that while the rains were an unavoidable natural disaster, the man-made disaster "caused by negligence and greed" came higher on the scale of the year's noted events.

In fact the government was praised from the Tagammu's Mohieddin for its dealing with the crisis caused by the rains. He was joined by El-Sheikh, who said that now that rainstorms seemed to have become an annual event, "the government has learned from past experience how to cope with the consequences."

However, the authorities, along with the construction industry, came to face heavy criticism over the collapse of the building. In Zubeiri's opinion, the collapse showed that quick profit was becoming the hallmark of the construction industry, "which means that we should take a second look at all buildings in Cairo because the situation is very dangerous."

Former Prime Minister Khalil agreed that the building collapse highlighted the need to address "deficiencies in applying building regulations."

According to Mohieddin, the significance of the Heliopolis collapse lies in the fact that "it showed the defects of Egyptian society and the type of democracy which we practise." Describing the crisis as ongoing, Mohieddin said that he had raised the issue of sub-standard construction material as far back as 1984, when he was a member of parliament.

The collapsed building opened a can of worms concerning the application of construction regulations. Farkhonda Hassan said. And

director Ali agreed that the collapse was an obvious result of the "corruption and lax supervision" manifest in the open-door policies that began in the 1970s. She warned that if laws continue to go unheeded, "there will be many more disasters."

Samira Ahmed also concurred that the Heliopolis building "spotlighted negligence and corruption" in applying construction regulations. She predicted that the collapsed building was "only the tip of the iceberg." And Murad said that the collapse showed that "there has been a deficiency in local administration and construction laws, issues which must be addressed immediately."

Rashed, however, was more quiescent, saying that this year's disasters "touched us as human beings, but this is fate."

All personalities polled by the *Weekly* felt that terrorism did not feature prominently in this year's events. Although terrorism is on a downward curve, there were several eruptions of violence, the most serious of which was the attack on Great tourists in front of Europa Hotel along the Pyramids Road. Serageddin believes that although much terrorist activity has been quashed, "there were several incidents that served as reminders that terrorism is still alive." He praised the performance of the police force, saying that "they were very successful in preventing many terrorist operations by taking the initiative and pre-empting lots of plots."

Zubeiri also noted the stemming of militant activity. "Terrorists realised that they no longer affect the flow of tourism or make big headlines," he said. And Murad maintained that the decline in attacks during 1996 was a clear indication "that [militant Islamism] has been largely stifled."

The Tagammu's Mohieddin was somewhat less confident. While the security authorities had succeeded in reducing terrorist activity, he argued, the frequent eruptions of violence "show that the government's grip is not tight enough to suppress it altogether."

Director Fadel was "hopeful" that militant attacks were on the decline, but Ali disagreed. Terrorism would continue, she argued, "because it is obviously not a conflict involving forces from abroad, but an internal class struggle."

Other events of importance mentioned were the new map of Egypt, the opening of private universities and the choice of Cairo by UNESCO as the Arab world's cultural capital for 1996.

All roads lead to Cairo

At the initiative of Egypt, with the backing of Syria and Saudi Arabia, the first Arab summit in six years was held last June to put forward a united Arab response to the headline policies of Israel's newly-elected prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Less than a month after the Likud leader's election victory, Arab leaders gathered in Cairo and, in a rare display of unity, agreed for the first time that a comprehensive peace in the Middle East was their strategic objective. The declaration contrasted sharply with Netanyahu's foot-dragging on implementing the Palestinian autonomy accords and his rejection of a troop withdrawal from Syria's Golan Heights.

The final communiqué of the 22-23 June summit warned Israel that if it did not pursue the land-for-peace formula, it would bear "sole and full responsibility" for setbacks in relations in the region. The Gulf states of Qatar and Oman, which had set up commercial ties with Israel, announced that the growth of these relationships would be linked to progress on the peace tracks.

The Arab leaders also "condemned all forms of terrorism" but, in reference to Hizbullah's war against the Israeli presence in southern Lebanon, denounced "all attempts to label legitimate national resistance as terrorism."

Moderation prevailed at the summit, which brought together 21 of the 22 Arab League member states for the first time since the Iraq invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990. The flag of uninvited Iraq, the country which caused the intra-Arab split, was placed in front of an empty chair at the conference table.

On the fringe of the summit, some Arab leaders made attempts — not all successful — to resolve their differences and mend broken fences. President Hosni Mubarak, who co-hosted the summit with Syria and Saudi Arabia, led the way by meeting with Sudan's Omar Al-Bashir. The tête à tête, which failed to improve deteriorating bilateral relations, took place almost one year after Sudan was blamed for an abortive attempt on Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa on 26 June 1995.

Mubarak also brokered separate meetings between Syria's Hafez Al-Assad and Jordan's King Hussein and also between Assad and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. Jordan had accused Syria of sending saboteurs across the border to undermine its peace deal with Israel. Assad was angered by the separate peace agreements which the Jordanians and Palestinians had reached with Israel. But on the eve of the summit, Assad embraced and shook hands with Arafat for the first time in three years, and the next day ended a two-year rift with Jordan by meeting with King Hussein.

The summit was a diplomatic coup for Egypt because it presented the new Israeli government with a united Arab front and also served as a forum for resolving inter-Arab differences. The leaders agreed that annual Arab summits were necessary to further improve the climate of inter-Arab relations.

Before the summit convened, Egypt advised the Arab states to be patient with the new Israeli government, but as time passed it became clear that Netanyahu was delaying re-deployment from the West

Against all post-Oslo predictions of regional marginalisation, Egypt stood centre stage in Middle East politics in 1996. In Sharm El-Sheikh, the Cairo Arab summit, the MENA III conference and numerous other initiatives, Cairo acted forcefully to salvage the peace process, unify Arab ranks and counter Netanyahu's intransigent policies. Nevine Khalil reviews a year in Egyptian diplomacy



photo: AP

Bank town of Hebron and blocking progress along the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

Relations between Israel and Egypt hit an all-time low following Netanyahu's rise to power and the two countries became embroiled in a war of words. The Egyptian national and opposition press, already raging over Israeli reports that hundreds of Egyptian prisoners of war were killed in cold blood during the 1956 and 1967 wars, and at the pre-Israeli elections onslaught on Lebanon with its horrifying Qana massacre, waged a fierce anti-Netanyahu campaign. Tension mounted when the Israeli prime minister said in late September that Egypt would be "cutting off its nose to spite its face" if it postponed the regional economic cooperation conference, known as MENA III. Top diplomatic officials fired back with "stay away from Egypt's nose" and "Netanyahu needs psychiatric help." Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy expressed "extreme concern" about the official onslaught on the prime minister.

Netanyahu's provocative statements continued. His description of the Egyptian Badr 96 war games as a "preparation for war" were not received well by Cairo, with Egyptian officials charging that Netanyahu had exacerbated the situation. For his part, Netanyahu complained to US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross that Egypt "had crossed every line" with its threatening statements and military manoeuvres.

Mubarak's top political adviser Osama El-Baz described Netanyahu's actions as "a combination of ideological rigidity, headline policy and a lack of experience." In an interview with the *Al-Ahram Weekly*, El-Baz said that the Israeli prime minister "does not know how far things can go, what can work and what can't." He warned that if Israel continued on this hostile course of action, "it is likely to produce a greater degree of strain" in relations with Egypt.

Egyptian public opinion was boiling over with anti-Netanyahu sentiment when the prime minister paid his first visit to Cairo in July, which lasted only a few hours. But Mubarak was patient. According to El-Baz, he presented the Arab viewpoint on ways of re-activating the peace process "objectively and without using threats." Netanyahu was told that the Arabs would only accept the land-for-peace formula — and not Israel's security-for-peace deal — as the basis of future negotiations. Any signs of flexibility the Israeli prime minister might have shown in Cairo quickly

disappeared upon his return to Israel.

The Arabs continued to pin their hopes on the American role, but the Clinton administration, facing a presidential election battle, failed to put pressure on Israel. Although Arab emphasis that US foreign policy could not "take a holiday" to prepare for the elections, shuttle tours by Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Dennis Ross failed to break the deadlock. Egypt pressed ahead with its own efforts, fearing that inaction would bring about more violence. By August, "a good part" of the contacts between the parties were channelled through Cairo, according to an informed diplomatic source.

At a hastily arranged summit in Washington, Clinton failed to persuade Netanyahu to budge from his headline position. The October summit followed four days of clashes between the Palestinians and Israelis, triggered by the opening of a second entrance to a tunnel near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

Although invited, Mubarak stayed away from the conference which brought together Clinton, King Hussein, Arafat and Netanyahu. The Egyptian president explained his absence by declaring he was not optimistic about the outcome of the unsanctioned summit, and did not believe Netanyahu would make concessions. Mubarak told the press that Netanyahu's determination to keep the tunnel open was "discouraging and defied public opinion in the Arab, Muslim and Christian worlds." Another reason cited by Mubarak for staying away was that he could not go against Egyptian public opinion, which was angered by Israel's use of violence and Netanyahu's disrespect for his Arab neighbours.

Mubarak's position was praised by Arab states as an expression of national pride. The foreign media speculated that Egypt was upset because Israel had stepped down Cairo as a possible venue for a Netanyahu-Arafat meeting. El-Baz explained that Israel retreated from coming to Cairo when it was asked to meet "certain requirements in order to guarantee the success of the conference." He said that once Washington offered to host the summit, Israel took it up on its word.

Although he stayed away, Mubarak persuaded Arafat to attend the Washington summit and "fight through negotiations." Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, who was in New York at the time, offered to act as an adviser to Arafat but did not take part in the conference.

Before Netanyahu's rise to power, a larger summit

had been organised in Sharm El-Sheikh in an attempt to save the peace process following a series of suicide bombings in Israel committed by the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, in late February and early March. The 13 March Peacemakers' Summit was also intended to shore up the position of then Prime Minister Shimon Peres in the approaching elections. Mubarak and Clinton called for the summit, attended by 29 world leaders, "to enhance the peace process, promote security and combat terror."

Among the participants were Jordan's King Hussein, Russia's Boris Yeltsin, France's Jacques Chirac, Britain's John Major, Germany's Helmut Kohl, Spain's Felipe Gonzalez and UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali.

Mubarak told the *Weekly* at the time that the summit was necessary because the peace process had "de-terminated sharply" and that it was "very important to call for an international conference to show that terrorism is being denounced by a large majority of world leaders." He said the summit aimed to give Arafat "space to act" and Peres an opportunity to ease the Israeli blockade on the occupied territories imposed after the suicide bombings.

From an Arab perspective, the summit aimed at salvaging the peace process but, for the United States and Israel, the paramount concern was to combat terrorism. Disagreement over the summit's agenda continued until the eve of the conference when El-Baz travelled to Jerusalem for a few hours to try and contain the differences.

Absent from the summit were Syria and Lebanon; they saw no point in taking part while "their land remains occupied." Mubarak told the *Weekly* that he had advised both to attend so as "not to miss this opportunity to say what they want to say." But he acknowledged they had their own reasons for staying away. The Syrian-Israeli negotiations aimed at a land-for-peace accord were suspended almost immediately after the suicide bombings.

Although the summit was hailed at the time as a major success, there was only a partial lifting of the blockade of the Occupied Territories for 24 hours. The conference also failed to take any solid action against terrorism, or even to improve the position of Peres, who lost the May elections.

Egypt, like the rest of the Arab states, welcomed a more active European role in the peace process, and France took credit for rallying European support for

the Arab position. During his state visit to Egypt in May, French President Jacques Chirac committed Europe to an expanded role. "Europe cannot be a financier," Chirac said. "It must increase its political input so that it will become one of the sponsors."

Soon after the Arab summit, Mubarak met with Chirac again in Paris to review the outcome of the Cairo summit, a G7 meeting in Lyon and a European summit in Florence.

Mubarak, who upheld the belief that the US remains the main peace broker in the region, secured a firm commitment to an active American role during a five-day visit to Washington. The July trip came a few weeks after Netanyahu's first visit to Washington and was described by El-Baz as an opportunity "to form and perceive the situation in a broader light."

Sources close to Mubarak told the *Weekly* at the time that he was worried about possible "wavering" in the US position because Netanyahu's new approach to the peace process had not encountered any "visible opposition" from the US administration.

Even though Israel's policies continued to augur ill for regional stability and future economic prosperity, the third Middle East/North Africa economic conference (MENA III) was held in Cairo on 12-14 November. Its opening followed a protracted controversy in which Egypt threatened to postpone the conference or cancel it altogether.

Moussa and El-Baz made it clear in September that Egypt was seriously considering postponing MENA III if Israel did not follow through on signed agreements with the Palestinians. Cairo, declaring that the political atmosphere was not conducive to success, said at the time that it did not want a "ceremonial" conference. Moussa even offered a *quid pro quo* to Israel, saying that it was "impossible" to hold the conference on time if Israel did not withdraw from Hebron. Israel responded that its troops would redeploy from Hebron only when the time was right.

After a series of meetings with the Egyptian business community, Mubarak decided that Egypt's interests must come ahead of regional political difficulties. What Egypt sought to accomplish was to attract maximum foreign investments and promote regional cooperation between the private sectors of different nations. A few weeks ahead of the November opening date, Mubarak announced unequivocally that he was going ahead with the conference because it would be a good opportunity to showcase Egypt's economic reform programme and attract investments. He emphasised that the conference would not focus on integrating Israel into the region's economy. Conference proceedings bore out Mubarak's words.

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Ganzouri's year of bustle

Luring investments, stepping up privatisation and combating corruption were the salient features of Kamal El-Ganzouri's new cabinet. Mona El-Nahhas assesses its performance



On 4 January, Kamal El-Ganzouri, one of the architects of the nation's economic reform programme, formed a new 32-man cabinet that replaced the nine-year-old administration of Prime Minister Ataf Sidki. El-Ganzouri's cabinet was commissioned by President Hosni Mubarak to lead the nation into the 21st century. "Since we are aware of your efficiency, wide experience, sound judgement and high abilities, we have decided to entrust you with forming a cabinet capable of continuing the process of reform, development and progress," Mubarak wrote in the letter asking El-Ganzouri to head the new administration.

In an indication that no major policy changes should be expected, El-Ganzouri, until then a deputy prime minister, retained many members of the outgoing cabinet. The key portfolios of defence, foreign affairs, the interior and information remained in the same hands, but nine newcomers joined the cabinet, mostly filling portfolios dealing with finance, economy and planning.

The change of the so-called "economic group" indicated that economic reform would top the new cabinet's priorities. Sidki's cabinet had come under fire for its slow implementation of the reform programme, started in May 1990, as well as privatisation. Encouraging investments and private enterprise are the hallmarks of the second phase of the reform programme. Mohamed El-Ghazali, who previously served as president of the General Authority for Investment, said following his appointment as finance minister that he would orient ministry policies towards encouraging investments. Economy Minister Nawal El-Tantawi, with a long experience as a banker, was required to gear up the banking sector to serve the same target. And El-Ganzouri himself was expected to speed up economic reform by capitalising on his connections with the world's monetary institutions.

In his first policy statement, El-Ganzouri announced that his cabinet would focus on upgrading the living standard of citizens who suffered from heavy taxation under Sidki. El-Ganzouri vowed that the prices of public services and commodities would not be increased and that no new taxes would be imposed.

In a major achievement, the cabinet managed to gain forgiveness of \$4.2 billion of the nation's debts. After intense negotiations, the cabinet managed to clinch an agreement with the International Monetary Fund that made it possible to write off the last tranche of 50 per cent

of Egypt's foreign debt waived by the Paris Club in 1991. Bent on luring foreign investments, the cabinet decided to draft a new law, giving greater advantages to investors and encouraging them to establish new projects, particularly in the Sinai Peninsula and the Western Desert's New Valley. Investors were allowed for the first time to finance the establishment of new highways by giving them concession rights for a limited period. And to encourage real estate investment, it was decided to simplify the procedure of registration with the public notary and cut down around 50 per cent of registration fees. The procedures of import and export were also simplified.

To give a push to privatisation, the cabinet decided in February to sell off 61 companies and 36 hotels owned by the public business sector, according to a time schedule. The sale, El-Ganzouri stressed, will be subject to several controls, including the protection of labour rights.

Expanding privatisation in the public services sector, the cabinet approved in July the establishment of four private universities for the first time. This was described by El-Ganzouri as a step toward upgrading university education in Egypt because competition between state and private universities was bound to improve the education level generally. Moreover, El-Ganzouri said, private universities will relieve state universities which cannot cope with the increasing number of students seeking enrolment.

The establishment of these universities was the subject of controversy, even before El-Ganzouri was made prime minister. Their opponents charged that private universities could be used as centres for trading in academic degrees. Hamdi El-Sayed, chairman of the Doctors' Syndicate, threatened to keep the graduates of private medical faculties outside the association. The government, for its part, underlined its determination to exercise tight control over the activities of private universities by publishing the executive statutes of Law 101 for 1992 which governs the establishment of these universities.

The new cabinet also showed determination to combat corruption. A case in point was the arrest of Abdel-Wahab El-Habbaq, chairman of the Holding Company for Engineering Industries, who allegedly gained as much as LE100 million in illicit commissions which he safely deposited in foreign banks.

Unconfirmed reports claimed that Sidki's outgoing cabinet covered up for El-Habbaq's activities because one of its members was involved in those activities. Before his arrest, El-Habbaq was persuaded to re-imburse the state for \$20 million which he transferred back to Egypt from Swiss banks. Press reports spoke of a secret deal under which El-Habbaq would remain free in exchange for the refund. Responding to these reports, El-Ganzouri vowed that there would be no cover-up for corruption and no protection for any official, regardless of his position, who tampers with state funds. El-Ganzouri also announced for the first time that El-Habbaq was being investigated by the Illicit Earnings Office, an affiliate of the Ministry of Justice.

To contain violations of the construction code, El-Ganzouri used his powers under the state of emergency to issue a martial order in November that imposed tougher penalties for such offences. An earlier martial order, issued in June, prohibited landowners from scooping up agricultural soil to make tracks or establishing buildings on agricultural land. Violators face imprisonment for up to five years and the confiscation of the equipment and tools used in committing these offences.

Attempting to find practical solutions to the housing crisis, El-Ganzouri decided in November to revive the rental system for apartments in government-owned buildings, a system which had been in force until the mid-1970s when a switch was made to a condominium sale. The decision will be applied first to apartments in buildings owned by the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) but will later be extended to buildings owned by other government departments and government-owned housing cooperatives. El-Ganzouri described the decision as a practical step, in line with a new housing law which removed controls on rent for new apartments. According to El-Ganzouri, the decision was also intended to encourage the private sector to follow suit and rent, rather than sell, apartments.

El-Ganzouri also established what may be called a new tradition of briefing opposition leaders on political and economic issues. Since he came to power, the prime minister held three meetings, beginning in January and ending in November, with leaders of political parties. Many of them welcomed the move as heralding a new phase of relations between the government and the opposition. But some demanded that the meetings be more frequent.

Reaching beyond the valley

President Mubarak has described the movement of the population into currently uninhabited desert areas as "the project of the 21st century." Mona El-Nahhas charts progress towards changing the map of Egypt

The cultivation and habitation of the desert will be a necessity in the next century, dictated by the nation's spiralling population growth, according to President Hosni Mubarak. With the population expected to jump from around 60 million to 85 million in the next 20 years, the area of inhabited land must expand outwards from the Nile Valley to cover the whole country, he said.

To this end, water is being channelled eastwards from the Nile, through the El-Salam Canal, to irrigate the Sinai desert. And in January, work will start on another irrigation canal, named after Sheikh Zayed Al-Nahayan of the United Arab Emirates, which will carry water to the arid plains of the Western Desert. Establishing this "new Delta," Mubarak said, is the project of the 21st century.

The El-Salam Canal, whose construction will be completed in October at a cost of LE5.7 billion, will provide Sinai with 14 million cubic metres of water daily. The 240km-long canal begins at Faraskour near Damietta, runs eastward until it reaches the Suez Canal, then crosses under the waterway in four huge tunnels, before continuing eastward until it reaches a point south of Al-Arish, the largest town in Sinai.

By irrigating 620,000 feddans to the east and west of the Suez Canal, El-Salam will establish a link between the Nile Delta and the Sinai Peninsula. New urban communities absorbing up to three million people will be born.

Work on the first phase of the project and on three of the four tunnels running below the Suez Canal was completed in November. At that stage, the irrigation of 220,000 feddans in the governorates of Damietta, Port Said, Sharqia and Ismailia — all to the west of the Suez Canal — was made possible.

Once construction of the fourth tunnel is completed in April, Nile water will flow into Sinai for the first time to irrigate 400,000 feddans. "With the cultivation of these areas, a new life will start. Villages and towns will be established, services provided and job opportunities created," Mubarak said.

An equally ambitious project will kick off in January, when work on digging the El-Sheikh Zayed Canal be-

gins. The 590km-long canal will carry around 1.5 billion cubic metres of water from Lake Nasser, behind the Aswan High Dam, to a string of oases in the Western Desert.

"This project will give birth to new agricultural and industrial communities and will require a pioneer spirit and plenty of hard work," Mubarak said. "What is required is not a token exodus into the desert, but a complete redistribution of the population throughout the country."

It is not merely the construction of a new canal, but the establishment of a new delta, with activities such as agriculture, industry, mining, education and tourism, commented Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri. He added that 2.2 million feddans of land will be cultivated and 25 industrial zones established.

Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif said the project "represents Egypt's future. There can be no substitute for adding a new and integrated agricultural-industrial community (to the existing population centres in the Nile Valley)," he said.

Construction equipment has already arrived at Toshki, near Lake Nasser, and hundreds of engineers and workers are involved in preliminary work. A road is being paved to link Abu Simbel with the construction site.

The first section of the canal, running for 350km, will stretch from a point near Toshki to the Baris Oasis. Work on this section is expected to be completed by the end of 1999. The second section, 240km in length, will carry the water to the oasis of El-Farafa.

El-Sherif said that feasibility studies showed that digging a canal was the most cost-effective way of bringing water to the area. Proposed alternatives, such as the construction of tunnels or the installation of open pipes, had proved to be prohibitively expensive. The studies also showed that evaporation will not exceed one per cent of the volume of water, El-Sherif added.

Preparatory work began in October: aerial surveys were made, maps prepared, soil samples analysed and hydraulic studies of Lake Nasser carried out at a cost of LE190 million. Engineers determined the site for the construction of a pumping station to divert the water from Lake Nasser into the new canal. The station, consisting of 24 pumps, will be constructed at a point one kilometre away from the Toshki spillway.

Construction costs for the first part of the canal are estimated at LE6.5 billion.

Old rifts, new disputes

Old rifts continued to haunt the nation's leading opposition parties and, as Amira Howeidy reports, there was unprecedented dissension in the ranks of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood

Power conflicts and dissent, some of it old, some new, plagued almost all the opposition parties this year, with rival camps exchanging accusations and working to force their foes. Bickering, right, left and centre, broke out in the ranks of the liberal Wafd Party, the pan-Arab Nasserists, the Islamist-oriented Labour Party and Mustafa Kamel Murad's Liberals. Moreover, the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood suffered a major split, described as unprecedented in the group's 68-year history.

The first shot in the quarrel was fired by Abul-Ela Madi, a leading Brotherhood figure and assistant secretary-general of the Engineers Syndicate, when he applied for a licence to establish a political party in January. Madi's bid to establish the Al-Wasat (Centre) Party, with the backing of 74 Brotherhood members and three Christians, drew an angry reaction from the Brotherhood's Supreme Guide Mustafa Mashhour and his deputy, Mamoun El-Hodeibi.

The two accused Madi of making a "major mistake" by violating the group's regulations and going over the heads of his superiors. They argued that Madi should have sought the permission of the Brotherhood's General Consultative Council before filing the application with the semi-governmental Political Parties Committee. Madi and two of his associates were arrested by security authorities on 2 April on charges of political "manipulation" to provide a legal umbrella for the Brotherhood by establishing the Wasat Party. They were put on trial before a military court but were acquitted a few months later after their application was turned down by the Political Parties Committee.

While they languished behind bars, their supporters came under heavy pressure from Hodeibi to withdraw from the Wasat scheme. They were asked to hand in written resignations to Moustafar Nouh, a prominent Brotherhood figure and treasurer of the Bar Association. By doing this, Hodeibi hoped to place a legal obstacle in the way of the party's establishment by reducing the number of its would-be founders to less than 50, the minimum number required by law. Hodeibi's campaign bore fruit and more than 20 would-be founders handed in their resignations.

With the escalation of the quarrel, Brotherhood members started leaking information on a power struggle raging inside the organisation between the younger generation and the "old guard". This was followed by the resignations of several leading members, including Madi himself, Essam Sultan, a lawyer, Salah Abdel-Karim, deputy secretary-general of the Engineers Syndicate, Ibrahim El-Bayoumi Ghannam, a researcher, and Mohamed Abdel-Latif, head of the Al-Safir Islamic publishing house.

Unprecedented calls were also made for the resignation of the Guidance Bureau, the organisation's collective leadership. And leaders of the group's branches in the Nile Delta decided to put Brotherhood-related activity on ice in protest at what they called the "disastrous" situation brought about by the organisation's top brass.

The crisis reached its peak when Hodeibi decided to continue his war on the Wasat through the courts, once the Political Parties Tribunal had looked into the appeal made by the party's would-be founders. The court session originally was scheduled for 14 December but was postponed until 12 April due to the illness of Mohamed Setin El-Awadi, the founder's defence lawyer. Hodeibi planned to present the written resignations which he had collected to the court to prove that there were less than 50 would-be founder members, and thus providing the court with a legal justification for refusing to grant a licence to the embryonic party. The defections, however, say this scheme will end in failure because the Wasat's membership, in reality, is larger than this figure.

The generation gap also divided the camps in a power conflict within Daoud El-Dawoud's Democratic Nasserist Party, which came into legal existence five years ago. A cabinet minister under Nasser, Dawoud faced a revolt by the younger generation that sought to overthrow him, along with other party leaders, in February.

A few weeks before a scheduled meeting of the party's central committee, a group of young Nasserists accused Dawoud of "inefficiency", deviating from the party's ideology and leaning in the government's direction, and sparking opposition. The five-man group, led by Amin Iskandar and Hamdi Sebahi, later submitted a series of demands at the central committee meeting. The demands included the removal of Mahmoud El-Maraghi, chief editor of the party's mouthpiece, *Al-Arabi*, on the grounds that its circulation had dropped from 100,000 to 18,000. They also demanded that the party's huge debts be accounted for and that the party's sub-committees be reorganised. An angry Dawoud rejected their demands and abruptly ended the meeting.

The rebels took over, held their own expansive meeting and issued a series of resolutions. This was viewed by Dawoud as a violation of party regulations and he ordered that the rebels' membership be suspended, banning the five from party meetings or participation in any party activity. The newspaper *Al-Arabi* later published a statement by Dawoud stating that he had expected government-sponsored "conspiracies" following the parliamentary elections to "blow up" opposition parties from inside and tarnish their image.

Since then, the two camps have been trading accusations and counter-accusations while attempting to mobilise supporters. Iskandar's group was reported to be considering the establishment of its own political party.

As the Nasserists quarrelled among themselves, a simmering power conflict within the liberal Wafd Party exploded into the open. The party's chairman, Fouad Serageddin, became embroiled in a row with his brother, Yassin, in May, over the question of who should become the next party leader.

Fouad Serageddin, 85, had called for a general party congress following his return to work from a long sick leave, triggering speculation over who would succeed him after his death. The top candidate for the number one position was No'man Goma', who has been the party's deputy leader since 1989.

But Yassin Serageddin, who heads the Wafdist group of deputies in the People's Assembly, called for the abolition of the post of deputy leader because he viewed himself as Fouad's "natural" successor.

Under party regulations, if the post of party leader becomes vacant, the deputy leader becomes acting leader until a new chief is elected at a party congress, to be held within 60 days. Yassin Serageddin's fear lies in the possibility that 60 days would be sufficient time for Goma' to consolidate his support and ensure his election as party leader.

The divisions between the Goma' and Yassin Serageddin camps were exacerbated by the results of the election of the Wafd's Supreme Authority, which consolidated Goma's position by electing many of his supporters to the party's ruling body, giving him a tight grip on the party and placing him at the top of the list of candidates to succeed the ailing Fouad Serageddin.

Other party members charged that the elections, which confirmed a few ageing faces in the party's top posts, were rigged. Adli El-Murwael, a prominent lawyer and Wafdist figure, decided to take the party leadership to court for allegedly rigging the ballot. He later announced his resignation from the party which, he alleged, "has become a family business with very little politics involved." El-Murwael revealed plans to form a new conservative Wafd Party which, he claimed, had the support of 500 party members.

Other walkouts were staged by Mohamed Hassan El-Hefnawi and Ahmed Abu-Ismail, who decided to resign their membership for various reasons.

At the Liberal Party, dissension developed into a revolt when party leader Mustafa Kamel Murad ordered the dismissal of Mustafa Bakri, chief editor of *Al-Ahram*, the party's mouthpiece. Murad accused Bakri of violating party policy by printing an article which many considered as defamatory to Rihan Sadeh, wife of the late President Anwar El-Sadat.

Not only did Bakri refuse to relinquish his post, he also convened an extraordinary party "congress" of 600 of his supporters, which dismissed Murad from the party's chairmanship and appointed himself temporarily in his place. Murad filed a complaint with the prosecutor-general, accusing Bakri of causing damage to the party's headquarters and holding workers at the newspaper's printing press hostage. The prosecutor ordered that control over the party and its newspaper be restored to Murad.

The Islamist-oriented Labour Party was shaken by a minor revolt, led by Gamal Shaker, a member of the party's executive committee. Shaker accused Adel Hussein, the party's secretary-general, of forging a coalition with the Muslim Brotherhood at the expense of the party's socialist ideology, and called for his resignation. Shaker also filed a complaint with the Political Parties Committee, charging that Hussein committed "financial and organisational irregularities." Shaker was backed by Abdallah Abu Hussein, secretary of the party's executive bureau, who charged that Labour had "been transformed into a religious party" and called for its dissolution.

Both Shaker and Abu Hussein were fired from the party two months ago.

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Appointments

New sheikh of Al-Azhar

SHEIKH Mohamed Sayed Tantawi was named on 27 March to head the 1,000-year-old Al-Azhar Mosque, succeeding Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq. The appointment of Tantawi, who previously served as the Grand Mufti of the Republic, was announced by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri after a meeting between President Mubarak and Tantawi. "We pray to God Almighty to make us successful in serving our religion, our nation and our homeland, and to guide us along the right path, whether in words or action," Tantawi, 67, said after the meeting.

Tantawi vowed to cooperate with Mahmoud Hamdi Zagzoug, minister of *al-awqaf* (religious endowments), in the service of religion. Tantawi said that Al-Azhar would continue its efforts to correct the erroneous ideas embraced by some people, whether inside or outside Egypt, expound the true teachings of Islam, and uphold its noble principles and role in serving humanity.

Tantawi is considered a liberal scholar. He came out against female genital mutilation after the late Gad El-Haq aroused the anger of feminist groups by calling it a religious duty. Tantawi also condemned bank interest in some cases, and approved the transplant of organs in cases of medical necessity.



New mufti

NASR Farid Wassef was appointed by presidential decree in November as the new Mufti of the Republic, replacing Sheikh Tantawi, who had been promoted to Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar. Wassef said following his appointment that only the *fatwas* (religious rulings) issued by Dar Al-Iftaa (the Mufti's office) are binding on all Muslims.

Talking about his future plans, Wassef said: "We'll continue along the same path and discharge the same duties in a way that is in accordance with the Qur'an and the *Sunna* (Teachings of the Prophet), and God willing, we will not deviate from them."

Wassef, 59, has been dean of the Faculty of Law and *Shari'a* at the Nile Delta University of Dakhliya since last year. He was also a professor of post-graduate studies and the head of the Comparative *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) Department at Al-Azhar University. He has written more than 20 books and studies related to Islamic *shari'a*, jurisprudence and legislation.



New head of the Administrative Control Authority

MAJ. GEN. Hittler El-Tantawi Ghousein was appointed by President Hosni Mubarak on 22 December to head the Administrative Control Authority, replacing Ahmed Abdel-Rahman, who has reached retirement age. El-Tantawi, 55, had served for the past seven years as secretary-general of the Defence Ministry.



New head of Radio and TV Union

MINISTER of Information Safwat El-Sharif assigned Abdel-Rahman Hafez on 15 December to serve as the new head of the Radio and Television Union, succeeding Amin Bassiouni. Hafez, 55, had occupied several posts at the union, and stated that its policy would remain unchanged.



New censor

ALI Abu-Shadi, a liberal cinema critic, was appointed last August by Culture Minister Farouq Hosni to head the Censorship Board of Artistic Works, a post which has been vacant since Doreya Sharafeddin, the former censor, submitted her resignation in April. Entertainers, whose relations with Sharafeddin appeared to have been strained, expressed the hope that Abu Shadi would bring about a radical change in the role of the censor, showing greater respect for creativity and freedom of expression.

Explaining the censorship board's new policy, Abu Shadi said: "Greater freedom of expression will be allowed. Objective political criticism will be tolerated and works which do not violate the rules of decency will not be blue-pencilled."

Before his appointment, Abu Shadi held a high position in the General Authority for Cultural Palaces, an affiliate of the Ministry of Culture. Abu Shadi is also the author of several books, including *Studies of Documentary Films*, and *Classics of the Arab Cinema*.



New head of Antiquities' Council

ALI Hassan was appointed in September as the new secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). Hassan said that he would give priority to the restoration of ancient monuments, because many of them are in dire need of repair. "My dream, which I will work hard to turn into reality, is to put the city of Alexandria on the tourist map by restoring and cleaning its archaeological sites," he said.

Hassan, who previously served as chief of the Pharaonic Department of the SCA, was elevated to secretary-general following the dismissal of Abdel-Halim Nouredin. No reason was officially given for the dismissal. However, SCA sources cited chronic differences between Nouredin and Culture Minister Farouq Hosni.



Compiled by Mona El-Nahhas

After endless hours of work, negotiations, and debates in the Shura Council and People's Assembly, the unpopular Law 93 was repealed to make way for a new and comprehensive press law. **Shaden Shehab** recalls events



Journalists meet in their last extraordinary general assembly to celebrate their victory

photo: Sami Bushra

Press freedom triumphs

The dispute between journalists and the government over Law 93, which increased penalties for publication offences, was finally ended by the intervention of President Hosni Mubarak just over a year after it began. On 13 June 1996 the president decreed that the law be repealed, and five days later the People's Assembly enacted a comprehensive new press law.

On the day Mubarak issued the decree, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri met with the Press Syndicate's council to discuss the final form of the new law. The draft was then forwarded to the People's Assembly, which approved it on 18 June. While journalists maintained that the new law did not meet all their demands, it was generally viewed as a great improvement on the unpopular Law 93.

The crisis first erupted at the end of May 1995, when the government rushed amendments to the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedures Law through the People's Assembly. The resulting legislation, dealing with publication offences and known as Law 93 for 1995, set off alarm bells in journalistic circles. Journalists had been kept in the dark about the new law's contents until the last minute, and they were appalled at the harsh penalties it imposed. They also objected to its generalised terminology, which they argued could be interpreted in such a way as to incriminate more or less any journalist.

The penalty for publishing false or malicious news or for deriding state institutions or public officials was raised from one to five years' imprisonment. Fines for publishing news that could undermine public order or the national economy, or spread panic, were upped from LE5,000 to LE20,000.

Worse, the legislation cancelled Article 135 of the Criminal Procedures Law, which stated that

journalists could not be taken into custody while under investigation for alleged publication offences. Fawzia Abdel-Sattar, chairperson of the Assembly's Legislative Committee at the time, argued that the abolished article was unconstitutional because it discriminated in favour of journalists.

Angered journalists held successive extraordinary general assemblies, vowing to get the law repealed. After they threatened to stage a general strike on 24 June 1995, Mubarak met with the Press Syndicate's council and promised that the provisions of Law 93 would not be enforced until an updated press law was prepared.

Nevertheless, around 100 journalists were questioned, charged or sentenced by judicial authorities on the basis of Law 93. Only one of them, Magdi Hussein, editor-in-chief of *Al-Shaab*, the bi-weekly mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, received a final sentence. He was found guilty of slandering the son of Interior Minister Hassan El-Alt and sentenced to a LE15,000 fine and a one-year suspended prison sentence. Hussein refused to pay the fine, and demanded that the case against him be dropped following the abolition of Law 93. As a result, he was briefly detained and then released by prosecution authorities on condition that he pay the fine in instalments over a period of nine months.

A government-appointed committee began work on a new press law in mid-July 1995, and, following heated debates between journalists and other committee members, completed its task nine months later, in March 1996. The draft it prepared contained only one positive factor as far as journalists were concerned: the cancellation of Law 93's article authorising prosecutors to take journalists into cus-

tody while investigating them for a publication offence. This amendment was only made after President Mubarak made it clear that he was not in favour of retaining the article at a meeting with writers and intellectuals on 7 March.

The new draft in fact cancelled the major part of Law 93, but the section it retained, Article Two, was considered by the journalists as the most important. This article covered various publication offences, and included the new stiffer penalties, including imprisonment. However, the new draft reduced the severity of some of the penalties included in the article.

Unhappy with the draft, journalists met in an extraordinary general assembly on 10 March and demanded amendments and modifications as a condition of their approval. They also demanded the explicit repeal of Law 93 as a whole, and that the updated draft be clearly marked as replacing provisions dealing with press freedom and publication offences contained in several laws, particularly the Penal Code, the Criminal Procedures Law and the law regulating Press Syndicate activities.

The journalists also presented the following demands: that all investigations and court hearings conducted in accordance with Law 93 be halted; that all provisions requiring imprisonment for those found guilty of publication offences be abolished; that journalists should not be arrested because of their work and should not be questioned, or have their homes and offices searched, because of a publication offence, except in the presence of a prosecution official; that the right to investigate the private lives of public officials should be enshrined as long as such an investigation was undertaken for the public good. The draft press law and the amendments demanded by journal-

ists were submitted to Mubarak who, in turn, sent them to the Shura Council for debate. To the disappointment of the journalists, council members fiercely defended the provisions of Law 93 and demanded even stiffer penalties for publication offences. The council approved the draft without including any of the journalists' demands.

Deeply frustrated by the strength and ferocity of the Council's opposition to their demands, and expecting an action replay when the draft reached the People's Assembly, journalists decided to appeal to Mubarak as the final arbiter. Ibrahim Nafie, the Press Syndicate's chairman, submitted a memorandum to the president, explaining the journalists' point of view.

During an extraordinary general assembly of the Press Syndicate on 12 June, the 13 members of the syndicate's council submitted their collective resignation. The walkout, they said, had been made unavoidable by the Shura Council's refusal to include any of the journalists' demands in the new law. However, before the meeting ended, Nafie surprised the assembled journalists by announcing that he had met with Mubarak the day before and that the president had promised to intervene to end the deadlock.

The following day, Mubarak issued a decree repealing Law 93 in its entirety. El-Ganzouri met with journalists and approved most of their demands, although the newly updated draft continued to make libel punishable by imprisonment or a fine, and retained the provision allowing a journalist to be imprisoned for violating Article 179 of the Penal Code, which deals with defaming or insulting the president. The new draft was sent to the

People's Assembly. Aware of Mubarak's decree and meetings between government representatives and journalists, Assembly members took a softer line towards the journalists than their Shura Council counterparts. The mood was friendly, with members heaping praise on Mubarak for championing press freedom.

Under the new press law, libel is punishable by up to one year in jail and/or a fine ranging between LE1,000 and LE5,000. If the libel is directed at a public official and is related to his public duties, the punishment is a maximum of two years' imprisonment and/or a fine ranging between LE5,000 and LE10,000. The malicious publication of false news or rumours which could disturb the peace, cause panic or undermine public interest is punished by a maximum of one year's imprisonment and/or a fine not less than LE5,000.

The law sanctions a journalist's right to obtain, and publish, information, statistics and news from government departments and public authorities. No restrictions should be imposed on the free flow of information, provided that national security and the national interest are taken into account. Documents, papers and information in a journalist's possession should not be used as evidence against him, unless they are the subject of an investigation.

Journalists met for their last extraordinary general assembly on 19 June, a little more than a year after the conflict began. It was a triumphant, happy occasion, in marked contrast to the fraught atmosphere of previous general assemblies. Journalists celebrated their victory, praised Mubarak, and ended the meeting with rousing cries, led by Nafie, of "Long live the freedom of the press... Long live the unity of journalists."

Free expression battles on

While the government introduced legislation to stop Islamists using the court system to harass and muzzle their opponents, freedom of expression was again challenged in 1996. **Amira Howeddy** reviews the year's record

In 1995, Islamist lawyers scored two major victories for religious conservatism by winning court orders divorcing Cairo University Professor Nasr Hamed Abo Zeid from his wife, on the grounds of apostasy, and banning Youssef Chahine's film *The Emigrant* for depicting the Biblical character of Joseph, whom Muslims revere as a prophet. The Islamist lawyers based the two cases on the Islamic doctrine of *hesba*, which upholds the right of every Muslim to take legal action against another Muslim or group of Muslims suspected of inflicting harm on Islam or violating religious teachings. Their action was widely viewed as an attempt to intimidate secular opponents by dragging them through the courts.

In response, the People's Assembly passed a government-sponsored law in February, regulating the procedures for filing *hesba* lawsuits in personal status affairs. This right was limited by the new law to prosecution authorities alone; individuals wishing to file *hesba* lawsuits had first to refer their complaint to the prosecution authorities, which would then decide whether to proceed.

The law was welcomed by Islamic moderates, but viewed by more conservative elements as "usurping a right enshrined in *shari'a*", as Sheikh Youssef El-Bedri, initiator of the lawsuit against Abo Zeid, put it. It also failed to satisfy human rights groups, because it did not abandon *hesba* altogether.

Although the law was intended to save Abo Zeid, it failed to do so. The law states that the courts should send *hesba*-based personal status lawsuits which they are "currently" hearing back to the prosecution authorities. But the courts refused to apply this provision in Abo Zeid's case because of a legal technicality: the case was not "currently" before the courts because a verdict had already been handed down.

The government reacted by sending an amendment to the Commercial and Civil Pleading Law through parliament in June, stating that only those with a direct interest are allowed to file lawsuits with the courts. This should have quashed the case against Abo Zeid, because the plaintiffs had nothing to gain by divorcing him from his wife. But to the surprise of many, the Court of Cassation, which was then considering an appeal filed by Abo Zeid, not only failed to quash the original lawsuit but also upheld the divorce order. The court's decision sent shockwaves through secularist circles and civil rights groups and forced Abo Zeid and his wife to prolong self-imposed exile in Holland. Their lawyers continue to fight a

complicated legal battle to have the divorce order reversed. Although the new legislation demonstrated some commitment to freedom of expression on the part of the government, it was nevertheless accused of repression by both human rights groups and Islamists. Complaining of a state of "intolerance" dominating the political, cultural and religious scenes, the Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid (CHRLA) is currently preparing a number of lawsuits contesting the constitutionality of several freedom-restricting laws, including the penal code and the press and publication laws.

"By the beginning of the new year, we will be standing before the Constitutional Court to fight laws that repress the freedom of expression," Hisham Mubarak, CHRLA's head, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. He accused both the government and the Islamists of slapping "restrictions against thought and creativity, which have reached a peak during the past 12 months."

Hisham Mubarak described 1996 as a "turbulent" year for various groups and individuals whose right to express themselves, exercise their rights or practise their religion had been restricted in different ways. Although such cases involved different political trends, they were to some extent a reflection of the Islamist-secular divide in the country, he said.

The Translation and Publishing Department of Al-Azhar Mosque, which is legally empowered to examine any work of literature or art dealing with religion, continued to be the target of criticism. Secularists and human rights groups accused it of muzzling freedom of expression and intimidating intellectuals. This was manifested in the case of *The Emigrant* which was banned as a result of a lawsuit filed by a group of Islamist lawyers backed by Al-Azhar. The ban was briefly lifted and then re-imposed in June.

Al-Azhar was also behind the confiscation of *The Truth about the Veil*, a book by Counsellor Said El-Ashmawi, which questioned the assumption that the veil is a religious requirement for Muslim women. Al-Azhar also recommended that another book, Youssef El-Sabai's *Azrael's Deputy*, which has been in circulation for the past 30 years, be banned for making fun of the Angel of Death.

Islamists are also charging that their own freedom of expression is being violated by the government. Mohamed Abdel-Qodous, an Islamist who heads the Press Syn-

dicate's Freedoms Committee, said the channels of free expression "are almost entirely blocked to civil society, especially Islamists." He cited a recent law requiring preachers to obtain a permit from the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) before delivering sermons in mosques. "As a result, people will hear more official, government-oriented speeches, and there will be no room for other points of view," Abdel-Qodous described the arrest of 56 Shi'ites on charges of propagating the ideology of the Iranian revolution as "another violation of the freedom of expression and worship."



A file picture of Nasr Hamed Abo Zeid and his wife who are now living in Holland

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Tragedies: natural and man-made

The collapse of a 13-story apartment building in Heliopolis near the end of October killed 65 people, sent shockwaves through the nation and sounded the alarm about the spiralling number of construction violations. As a result, tougher penalties were introduced for construction violations and the spotlight was focused on faulty buildings in Nasr City, Qattaniya and the city of Suez. Less than three weeks after the collapse, torrential rains hit southern Egypt and the Red Sea coast, causing a Nile cruiser to overturn and sink, with the loss of 20 lives and flooding houses and agricultural land.

The Heliopolis building, 5 Adallah Nour Street, came down at 6.25pm on 27 October. Rescue workers, who searched the rubble for the next seven days, recovered 65 bodies, many from the stairwell area which became known as the "death trap". At least 22 people, including two girls, one Egyptian and the other American, who spent 36 hours buried under the debris, survived the disaster.

In a matter of minutes, most of the building was reduced to a heap of masonry and twisted metal, but five storeys at the rear side remained standing and were later demolished. A radiology clinic on the ground floor, containing \$2 million worth of equipment, escaped unscathed.

Hundreds of members of the emergency services, the army and civil defence units, were sent to the site and, three days later, received assistance from German, Japanese and Hungarian teams. Cranes moved huge slabs of concrete, sniffer dogs prowled the ruins and special listening devices were brought in to pick up tapping or calls for help. The search continued round the clock, with generator-powered floodlights at night.

The dead included the wife and three children of a Saudi Arabian diplomat, a former Sudanese information minister and his wife, the sister of the Saudi Arabian under-secretary for communications, a Jordanian businessman, his wife and their son.

A committee of construction engineering professors was set up to investigate the causes of the collapse. Its report concluded that the main reason it had occurred was that the pillars supporting the structure were overloaded because the landlord had added five unauthorised storeys to the top of the building in 1976. Another reason, the committee said, was that one of the supporting pillars had been weakened or broken as a result of plumbing or electrical work and/or the demolition of nearby walls. This presumably occurred while construction engineers were renovating an apartment on the first floor to be used as an exchange room for the Egyptian Federation of Banks. Committee member Abdelhadi Abu Zaid said that without the addition of the unauthorised floors, the breaking of the pillar, by itself, would not have caused the building to collapse.

Raufi Wissa Ibrahim, the owner of the building, and three construction engineers alleged to

Two major disasters, the first man-made and the second the work of nature, hit the country in the last quarter of 1996, claiming the lives of scores of people. Shaden Shehab looks back at the tragedies



photo: Khaled El-Fegh

be responsible for the demolition of the walls on the first floor, were taken into custody and charged with manslaughter.

The tragedy was the third building collapse to hit Heliopolis in five years. As a result of the October 1992 earthquake, a 15-storey building on Al-Hegaz Street fell, killing 67 people. The owner, Camelia Ali Awad, her husband and a partner, were each sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. On 28 January 1993, a six-storey building, also on Al-Hegaz Street, collapsed, killing 20 people. The dead included the building's owner, Esmat Ali Mahmoud.

The latest collapse focused attention on the prevalence of construction violations, which could result in similar, or even larger, tragedies, and revived a controversy over whether the existing penalties were sufficiently severe. A 1976 law provided penalties ranging from five to 10 years in prison for the use of substandard construction materials, for poor architectural planning or poor implementation of plans, and for inadequate supervision of work. The law was replaced by a tougher one last June which provided a penalty of life imprisonment with hard labour if the offence resulted in the death of one

or more people. This law also gave provincial governors greater powers to curb building violations, both with regard to height restrictions including the power to demolish violating storeys — and construction materials.

And, to appease public fury at property owners who violated building laws, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri used his powers under the state of emergency in force since 1981 to issue a martial order, imposing even tougher punishments. He set a minimum of five years' imprisonment, and a maximum of seven, for failure to meet the technical specifications of plans, or failure to comply with the construction plans on the basis of which the building licence was issued. If all or part of the building collapses or becomes dilapidated as a result of these violations, the punishment is raised to a minimum of seven years with hard labour. If the violation results in the death of one person or more, or the injury of more than three people, the offenders will be punished by a minimum 10 years' imprisonment with hard labour.

The martial order also set a minimum sentence of one year's imprisonment for making alterations or adding extra floors without obtaining a

licence. And, for the first time, these punishments were made applicable to municipal officials who turn a blind eye to such violations, in addition to the owners of the building and its construction engineers.

The disaster led to a spate of reports that other buildings are on the verge of collapse. Police evacuated several buildings in Heliopolis, Nasr City, Giza and Alexandria on the grounds that they were unsafe. In addition, hundreds of buildings constructed by the Authority of Housing Cooperatives, an affiliate of the Ministry of Housing, were found to have defects.

Housing Minister Ibrahim Sulaiman told the People's Assembly that construction code violations had been discovered in 41 buildings in the eastern suburb of Nasr City, 112 buildings in Qattaniya, south-east of Cairo, and 114 in Suez City — all owned by the Authority of Housing Cooperatives. He said the ministry's Building Research Centre would examine these buildings before a final decision was made on whether they should be demolished.

In a report to parliament's Housing Committee, Minister of Local Administration Mahmoud El-Sherif said there are 573,889 construction violations throughout the country. This figure, he said, includes around 218,000 buildings which were built without construction licences and 102,000 buildings where extra storeys had been added without a licence.

In another major disaster, torrential rains lashed southern Egypt and the Red Sea coast in the second half of November, destroying houses, damaging cultivated land and causing a Nile cruiser to sink. The Princess Nihon, carrying 63 foreigners and 45 Egyptians, overturned and went down on 21 November near Edfu in the southern province of Assiut. Twenty people drowned.

Other rain-related deaths included four members of the same family who were electrocuted when an electricity line fell on their home near Manshiut in the governorate of Assiut. A 10-year-old girl died in Al-Minya when she was crushed by a palm tree toppled by the flooding. A woman in Assiut was also electrocuted and another woman in Sohag died of a heart attack when the flash floods struck her village.

The houses destroyed by the storms were mainly made of mudbrick, which disintegrated in the flooding. In Mallawi in the governorate of Al-Minya, 260 houses and thousands of acres of agricultural land were flooded and power and telephone services were disrupted. In Qena, the village of Al-Matna was devastated and its inhabitants had to take refuge on a nearby mountain. In some areas of Assiut, water levels reached 1.5 metres and motorists had to leave their cars on the roads and run for safety.

In the Red Sea resort of Hurgada, a man was killed by an electric short circuit and 250 houses were destroyed or damaged. The airport was blocked by water, mud and rocks, interrupting air traffic. Rains knocked out the power supply and telephone lines.

Terrorism down but not out

Although incidents of militant violence continued, political experts and security officials are in agreement that it showed significant signs of decline. Jallan Halawi reviews a year in the fight against terrorism

Terrorism was in decline in 1996, "both in quantity and quality," according to Dina Rashwan, an expert at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies. The geographical area where attacks took place also shrank. However this generally positive picture was marred by a major terrorist operation in April, which, according to Rashwan, marked a change in the militants' strategy.

On 18 April, four terrorists opened fire with automatic weapons outside the Europa Hotel on the Pyramids Road, killing 18 Greek tourists, most of them women, and wounding 17 others. The four attackers, plus a fifth militant who acted as a lookout, then escaped in a commandeered microbus.

Two days later, the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya claimed responsibility for the attack and said it had been intended to target Israeli tourists to avenge the Israeli "aggression" against Lebanon, admitting, by implication, that the Greeks had been killed by mistake. The Arabic-language press reported that there were some 10 Israeli Arabs inside the hotel at the time.

"The significance of this attack is that it was intended to target Israelis," Rashwan said. "It marked a change in [the militants'] strategy, ideology and organisation. And although it was not followed by other attacks on Israeli targets, it left the door open to the possibility of further action."

It was the first time that Israelis had been the target of Islamist attacks, which had previously focused on destabilising and undermining the government, Rashwan said. The strategy of Al-Gama'a is to establish an Islamic state which would then fight Israel, he added.

The southern governorate of Assiut was also the scene of bloodshed during 1996. In two consecutive weeks in February, a new eruption of violence shattered a lull which had lasted almost two years, claiming the lives of at least 23 people. The dead included Christians, policemen, militants and bystanders caught in the crossfire.

Assiut had been relatively quiet since the summer of 1994, when the militants were dislodged by the security forces; they then shifted their activities to the neighbouring governorate of Al-Minya to the north.

A senior security official, speaking to Al-Ahram Weekly on condition of anonymity, blamed the resurgence of violence in Assiut on the killing of two top members of Al-Gama'a — Mahmoud El-Wahidi and Ali Mohamed Sotouhi — during a police raid on their hideout in the governorate of Sohag, further to the south, on 14 February.

In what was described by Police Maj. Gen. Magdi El-Bassiouni, Assiut's security chief at the time, as "clearly an act of revenge," militants ambushed and killed two police officers two days later in the town of Sahel Selim. Three bystanders were also wounded in that attack.

On 19 February, the eve of the Eid Al-Fitr feast, three militants from the Salama family, which is involved in an ongoing feud with the rival El-Hadaya family, sprayed a sidewalk cafe in the town of Al-Badri with automatic rifle

fire, as two of their adversaries sat inside. Seven people were killed, including passengers who attempted to give chase to the assailants. Security forces, using armoured vehicles and amphibious craft for speedy crossing of canals, combed the area for the escaped gunmen, who had taken refuge in nearby fields. At least 32 people were arrested.

Then, on 20 February, the day of the feast, unknown gunmen opened fire on residents of the village of Teas, killing two Christian brothers and wounding a third. As the security forces continued their sweep of the area, two women were killed in a shootout near the home of militant Abdel-Rahman Salama. Another militant, Abdel-Hamid Mohamed Shehata, and a policeman, were killed in a police raid on a mountainous area east of Al-Badri.

But the worst carnage occurred on 24 February, when three escaped militants entered the predominantly-Coptic Outfarniya village, south of Al-Badri, and opened fire at random, killing eight people. In one report, all eight were described as Coptic; in another, six were said to be Coptic and two Muslim.

The Interior Ministry said at the time that the situation remained under control, describing the attacks as "a few remaining fugitives on the run."

The security official told the Weekly that the situation in Assiut is stable. "These incidents are confined to the areas of Al-Badri and Sahel Selim," both close to the eastern mountains, the main hideout for fugitives in the area," he said. The assaults, he added, "are not terrorists in the real sense of the word but *material* — escaped criminals. They don't have the ability to carry out terrorist attacks such as planting a bomb in a building or a train."

The official denied that Copts were targeted because of their religion. "These attacks are meant to punish those who provide the police with information about the whereabouts of escaped militants," he said.

According to the official, the town of Mallawi in the governorate of Al-Minya continues to be a hotbed of Islamist violence. "Mallawi hosts the most dangerous terrorist elements, led by Farid Kadrawi, their top leader in Al-Minya," he said. Nevertheless, even in Mallawi conditions are improving, and a night-time curfew imposed on the town of 40,000 for the previous 18 months, was lifted on 18 March.

In a daring heist in broad daylight, four gunmen robbed the Ayyat branch of Banque Misr in Giza Governorate on 5 August, stealing LE300,000. The men, one of whom was dressed in a uniform similar to that of a police officer, drove up to the bank in a green Peugeot and walked away with the loot after firing randomly, killing a guard and wounding three other men in a hail of bullets.

Another robbery followed on 17 August, when militants raided three jewellery shops at Taba in the Governorate of Sohag. Two Coptic jewellers were killed and three other people were wounded. The militants escaped in a hijacked truck with 15kg of gold, worth LE600,000, and LE15,000 in cash. The Interior Ministry said the

militants had apparently turned to robbery after the government succeeded in cutting off their funding from abroad and established several centres in a wide-scale operation in October, described as the first of its kind, the security forces went on the offensive. Large numbers of policemen scoured mountainous areas east of the Nile in the southern governorate of Sohag, used as hideouts by Islamist militants. The eastern mountains in the Governorate of Assiut were being purged by the security forces a few weeks earlier.

The Sohag operation began on 18 October, with hundreds of security men sweeping into the largely uninhabited mountainous areas. According to an Interior Ministry statement, the militants used caves and grottoes in areas east of Saqqila and Akhmim as hideouts and bases from which to carry out their attacks. Large amounts of supplies and blankets were found inside the caves, but there was no official word on casualties. Police seized two automatic weapons, ammunition and a quantity of explosives.

In addition to the militant Islamist groups, the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood was the target of a crackdown by the security authorities. In January, 62 of the organisation's members were rounded up and put on military trial. 55 of them were sentenced to terms of imprisonment of up to five years. They were found guilty of joining an illegal underground group whose aim was to overthrow the government by force, and of possessing literature inciting hatred of the government.

Thirteen other Brotherhood members were arrested in April. The security authorities charged that the Brotherhood had acted to revive its clandestine activities and its connections with Islamist militant organisations. Those arrested included Abdul-Ela Madi, deputy secretary of the Engineers Syndicate, who spearheaded an attempt to establish the Al-Wasat (Centre) Party, and two of his associates, along with university professors, two former members of parliament and a doctor.

Of the 13, five were acquitted, including the three would-be founders of the Wasat Party. Seven were sentenced to three years in prison and an eighth received a one-year suspended sentence. According to Rashwan, who claimed that the Brotherhood was the largest political force in Egypt, "whether legitimately or not," the crackdown on the illegal organisation and the government's refusal to tolerate the Wasat Party "show that the government is not prepared to allow the political map of Egypt to be reshaped."

Muslim Shi'ites were also the target of a separate crackdown. On 21 October, the Interior Ministry announced that 56 Shi'ites had been arrested on charges of forming an underground group to propagate Shi'ite ideology. Those arrested were said to have established several centres in five governorates and to have planned to set up a supreme council to lead the Shi'ite movement in Egypt. With funding from local and foreign sources amounting to LE100,000, the group planned to infiltrate some of the opposition political parties and use them to prop-

agate the Iranian ideology, the ministry said. The group's leaders were said to have visited Iran and established contact with leading Iranian and Arab Shi'ite figures.

In an altogether different incident, an American Military Intelligence agent was stabbed to death on 15 July at the Semiramis Hotel in downtown Cairo in an attack by a man described by police as mentally disturbed. The agent, 56-year-old Judith Iris Goldenberg, was stabbed in the back by the lone attacker just inside the hotel entrance.

The US Embassy ruled out the possibility that she had been deliberately targeted. The killing, American officials said, was a random act of violence. Goldenberg had been on temporary duty at the embassy, filling in over the summer, the officials said. There was no indication that she was killed because of her nationality or profession.

The killer, Omar Mohamed Noe'ma, was arrested at the scene. Police found documents in his apartment showing that he suffered from schizophrenia and had been exempted from military service because of his illness. He was confined to a psychiatric hospital for tests to determine his mental state. Nothing has been heard about him since.

The mental competence of those taking part in another bizarre incident was also called into question. In March, an Egyptian Airbus A-310 was hijacked on a domestic flight from Luxor to Cairo and forced to change course and land in Libya. The hijacker, Mohamed Mahmoud Selim, 43, was sentenced by the Supreme State Security Court in November to life (25 years) imprisonment with hard labour. His two young accomplices, Khaled Mahmoud Elmoel, 16, and Ahmed Hussein Kamel, 17, were sentenced to 10 years and three years imprisonment respectively. A fourth defendant, Abdel-Wahab Monchhar Said, 65, got seven years with hard labour for providing Selim with gunpowder which he used to force the pilot to change course to Libya.

The court rejected the defence lawyer's contention that Selim suffered from a mental illness to find him guilty of deliberately planning and carrying out the hijacking. Selim had told interrogators he masterminded the hijacking because he wanted to gain political asylum in Libya. He was also quoted as saying that he wanted to bring glory to his clan, show opposition to Israel's blockade of the occupied Palestinian territories and convey a "message from God" to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

In Rashwan's view, the hijacking has no relation to political terrorism. "This is the case of a clan in Upper Egypt which believes that it has not taken its rightful place in the social hierarchy. It was also obvious from Selim's confessions that he suffered from certain psychological problems."

According to Interior Ministry figures, the death toll from militant violence amounted to 168 throughout the year. The figure includes 33 militants, 41 policemen, 30 Coptic civilians, 45 Muslim civilians and 19 foreigners — the 18 Greek tourists and the American agent.

Obituaries

January

15 Abdel-Wahab Mohamed, 65, contemporary song writer.

20 Mohamed Hamed Abul-Nasr, 83, the supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood

23 Fatma Rusudi 'The Sarah Bernhardt of the East', 88, pioneer of Egyptian theatre at the turn of the century, who was famous for her death scenes on stage.

23 Abdel-Moneim El-Kasas, 69, sculptor.

30 Bichara Gibrail Takla, 66, grandson of Al-Ahram founder Bichara Takla.

February

8 Adel Adham, 68, famed villian actor, after a celebrated career playing fiend in Egyptian cinema.

23 Abdallah Abdel-Bari, 72, chairman of Al-Ahram 1979-1984 and Mayo newspaper 1980-1996.

29 Khaled Mohamed Khaled, 67, famed Islamic thinker.

March

9 Sheikh Mohamed El-Ghazali, 79, renowned Islamic scholar and preacher.

15 Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq, 79, after 14 years as head of the world's most influential Islamic institution.

30 Esmat Seif El-Dawla, 73, renowned political thinker and writer.

June

13 Zouzou Nabil 'The Sheherazade of the Orient', 76, after 60 years performing on the stage, in cinema and television.

August

17 Saleh Mursi, 67, famed spy writer whose work was turned into television soap operas dealing with Egyptian-Israeli espionage operations

24 Ahmed Bahaseeddin, 69, veteran Al-Ahram columnist.

September

11 Latifa El-Zayyat, 73, feminist writer.

17 Abbas Mahrouk, 61, editor of the science section at Al-Ahram.

October

1 Mohamed Shebl, 49, film director and Al-Ahram Weekly's film critic, who directed a series of documentary films about Youssef Chahine.

27 A 13-storey building in Heliopolis collapsed claiming 65 lives.

29 Adel Afifi, 55, head of Al-Ahram's advertising department.

November

27 Minister of Irrigation and Public Works Abdel-Hadi Raddi, 59, who supervised the inauguration of the Toshki Canal.

16 Alaa Hammouch, 49, director of the National Centre for Children's Culture.

December

9 Karim Mutawie, 62, veteran theatre actor and director.

6 Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk, 63, controversial Islamic preacher.

22 Ahmed El-Khawaga, 70, chairman of the Bar Association and head of the Arab Lawyers' Union.

22 Mamdouh Taha, 77, veteran Al-Ahram journalist.

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Economic reform pay offs

Rapid reform initiatives characterised the country's economic climate during 1996, bringing about increased investment and a new place for Egypt on the map of international emerging markets, writes **Aziza Sami**

The perception among local business circles and international investors is that the economic reform programme, which received added impetus four years ago, finally began yielding significant returns in 1996.

The major developments have been numerous and exceedingly important. Inflation rates have been reduced in 8.3 per cent, hard currency reserves are estimated at \$18.5 billion and the surplus in the balance of payments is estimated at \$570.6 million. To a large extent, the debt burden has been lifted with the Paris Club's wiping clean roughly \$4 billion in Egyptian debt in October. This has been coupled with a political climate which seems to be irreversibly bent on economic liberalisation, the allotting of a larger portion of national investments to the private sector and international recognition of Egypt as a bustling emerging market. Evidence of this can be seen in positive ratings of the economy's performance by financial institutions such as Moody's and Goldman-Sachs.

Despite trepidation over the political climate under which it was held, the government was successful in holding the third Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference (MENA) in a manner that promoted its investment potential to international investors.

In this regard, MENA was the logical continuation of initiatives begun four years ago by the government in drawing multinationals in Egypt. And the businesses have begun to respond. Several multinational car manufacturers have set up plants in Egypt which not only include an assembly line but also the manufacturing of individual parts. To further promote this process, the government has been diligent in complying with the articles of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, notably reducing customs tariffs — a

move aimed at increasing Egypt's integration into the global market. As the privatisation programme gained momentum in the general atmosphere of assurance and the minimising of red-tape in the start-up of investment projects, the share of private investments for the fiscal year 1995-96, as reported by the Central Bank of Egypt, rose to 49.2 per cent, compared to 40.9 per cent in the preceding year. Moreover, foreign portfolio investments rose to \$380 million from April to September of 1996, as direct investments in new projects and privatised assets also increased.

The government then called on the private sector to shoulder a major share in development schemes for new communities in the Sinai, the New Valley and the governorates of Upper Egypt.

Notwithstanding complaints over the multiplicity of investment laws in force, as well as cumbersome bureaucratic procedures which never fail to irritate investors, there is a feeling that the investment climate has taken significant strides forward, especially with regard to foreign investors who began operating in Egypt during the start of the open-door policy.

"The climate is more positive now than it has ever been," said Aref Hakki, managing director of Asse Brown Boveri (ABB), an Egyptian holding company and the local affiliate of the Swedish multinational, ABB, an electrical engineering group operating in Egypt since 1979. ABB provides the government with numerous turnkey projects, currently involving high-voltage technology. "If it was difficult to get started at the beginning, now it is infinitely easier, with thoughts turning to Egypt as a regional market due to its potential."

"The high engineering capabilities in Egypt, and its size as a market, have

caused ABB to think of negotiating Egypt as one of the few bases, outside of Europe, (along with South Africa and Spain) from which to manufacture and export high voltage technology for the global market."

The implementation of such a step would make Egypt an eligible recipient of advanced technology to serve as a base for launching a global project involving large-scale investments. Despite the strides that have been realised, there still remain several stumbling blocks, mainly dealing with the current tax laws.

"There has been a transparency of tax laws where there is no disparity between the law and how it is executed," said Amr Mustafa, general director of ABB-High Voltage Company Egypt.

He also cited the need for amending labour laws to suit the mood of the market which could go through periods of recession. "No one will dismiss a good worker, but if the need arises then the owner of capital should be able to take steps without going through extensive court procedures. We need clear labour laws which would greatly help investors," he said.

Business circles expect their complaints to be redressed in the current People's Assembly session, which is discussing a new unified companies bill aimed at reforming the existing tax structure and providing new exemptions and incentives for investors.

The acceleration of the privatisation process during the first part of the year also impacted positively on the Egyptian capital market, resulting in a surge of activity and a wave of new foreign and domestic investors seeking to stake their claim to shares of newly-privatised enterprises.

The market was greatly activated by the sale of a large number of public works

companies' shares on the Cairo and Alexandria stock exchanges, leading to over-subscription as investors rushed to trade in shares, and several international mutual funds were drawn to the market.

Experts in the banking sector say that the liberalisation of the financial sector and positive investment climate has had its greatest impact on banks' investment operations. With the deregulation of the banking sector, increased competitiveness and liberalisation of interest rates, banks played a positive role in improving the investment climate by drawing more deposits in Egyptian pounds, which have now become more attractive to investors.

Banks also activated the capital market by launching mutual funds and buying and creating portfolios, as well as leading and managing bond issues on the market.

Several banks, after having covered a large portion of investments and borrowing needs of existing projects, are now thinking of reinforcing their investment operations in the funding of projects.

"The banking sector is probably what has progressed the most as a result of economic reform," said Mohamed Ozaib, senior general manager of Misr International Bank (MIB). "It has shifted from a passive, noncompetitive sector in a dynamic and competitive one. There is a tremendous increase in bank lending as interest rates and interest margins have come down; and banks have increased the quality and level of their services as a result of competition."

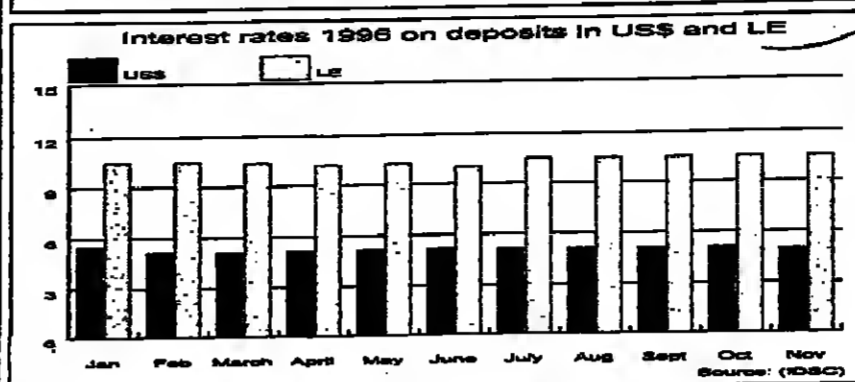
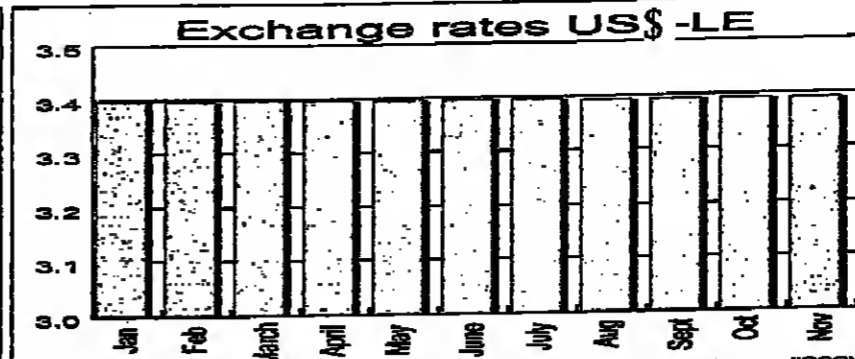
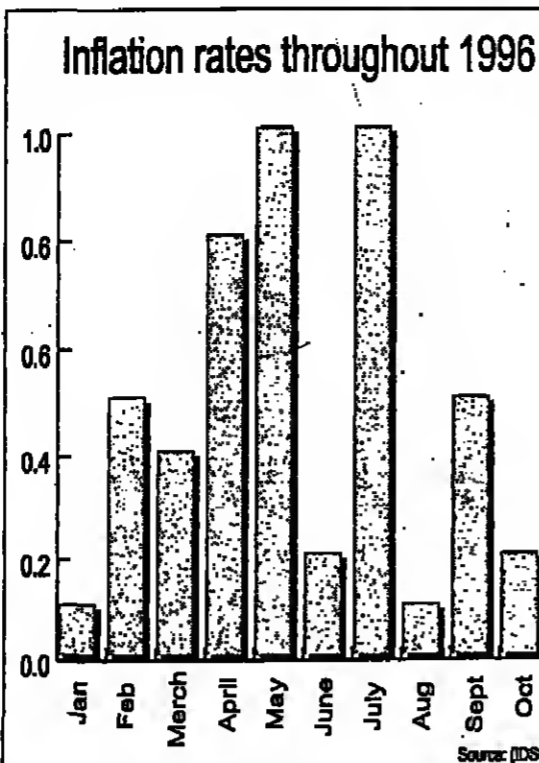
With the liquidity available in Egypt today, investors have recognised that it is one of the few developing countries which is, to a very large degree, self-sufficient in financing. "Even mega-project needs can be supplemented by accessing foreign markets, since there is a definite demand to finance projects in

Egypt," he noted. Ozaib added that deposits in Egyptian banks are estimated at "roughly LE154 billion, of which about 25 in 30 per cent are in foreign currency. This is not counting assets or funds owned by Egyptians abroad, which are estimated at anywhere between \$40 billion to \$70 billion."

"Approximately \$500 million has been invested in Egyptian capital markets in the last four or five months," he said. International investors were also encouraged by the successful launch of the GDR (General Depositary Receipts) issued by the Commercial International Bank (CIB) and the Suez Canal Company on the London Stock Exchange, signalling what Ozaib calls an "an international acceptance for Egypt which is at the highest I have seen."

Ozaib underlined that such issues were significant in terms of establishing a "market identity, and international recognition." However, he also expressed reservations over the actual need for the GDR issues, which incurred high administrative and commission costs. "Local market demand is high enough to attain the same results, with the best examples of this being the shares of the Helwan Cement Company, which were fully covered locally, including purchases made by foreign investors, at a fraction of the cost [of the GDR]," argued Ozaib.

Ratings by financial institutions such as Moody's and Goldman-Sachs have placed Egypt as one of the new emerging markets. Ozaib said that the "evaluation issued by Moody's of a Ba2 rating is arguably lower than the fundamentals warrant, but it will change investors' (negative) perceptions, as it is higher than ratings given to fast reforming economies such as those of Brazil and Argentina, and equal to those of leading emerging markets such as Mexico and the Philippines."



Watershed for stock market

Experts considered 1996 a turning point in the history of the Egyptian stock market. **Shereen Abdel-Razek** reports

Impressive improvement in the performance of the Egyptian economy, coupled with the acceleration of the privatisation programme, has resulted in an upswing on the capital market during 1996. The value of market transactions over the year reached LE6.8 billion (December not included), compared to roughly half this figure for 1995. The year was, as Ashraf Shamseddin, head of the Capital Market Authority's (CMA) Market Operations Department put it, a "turning point" for the stock market.

"The volume of transactions through the 11-month period ending November equals the market turnover through the 11-year period beginning in 1985," he said. Moreover, the market capitalisation — the total value of the shares traded on the market — jumped from LE27.42 billion in 1995 to LE37 billion in 1996.

Shamseddin pointed out that while the sound performance of the stock market has helped accelerate the pace of privatisation, the programme, in return, has provided the market with a broad range of securities. The number of securities traded on the market has nearly doubled during the year, reaching LE142 million, compared to LE72 million in 1995.

This, together with growing market transparency as a result of regulations stipulating that all companies listed on the exchange must introduce periodic, three-month results to the CMA, made the Egyptian market very appealing to foreign investors whose interest in the country has increased tremendously this year. By November, the volume of foreign investments, as a percentage of overall trading, totalled 48 per cent.

The increasing interest in the country on the part of foreign investors was also encouraged by the stock market's inclusion in the World Bank's International Finance Corporation's (IFC) Emerging Market Index, said Shamseddin. Egypt's listing on this index, he noted, probably came about as a result of mounting international interest in Egypt as a potential investment site.

He pointed out, however, that Egypt must exert more effort to increase its weight in the index. "Investors' decisions to direct their investments to Egypt are, to a great extent, affected by its relative weight (0.1) in the index," stated Shamseddin.

The new Central Depository System (CDS) was another reform initiative which Shamseddin highlighted. "Now, clearance and settlement facilities, appeals, market transactions," he said, "Under the new system, as computerised facilities are being introduced, transfer of share ownership takes no more than three days."

The CDS, according to Hisham Tawfik, managing director of the Egyptian Portfolio Management Group, has, in effect, streamlined and made more efficient the system for trading stock.

For brokers, however, changing over to the new system took some time before its full benefits could be felt. The delivery versus payment system, one of the new practices introduced with the CDS, said Tawfik, hampered the activity of brokers. With purchasers of shares no longer obliged to pay their value until they receive them, brokers were forced to shoulder the payments while, in many cases, far exceeding their available financial resources. As brokers became more acquainted with the CDS, these glitches quickly fell by the wayside.

In Tawfik's opinion, the mounting foreign interest in the market was the year's most significant change, crowning two years of intensive efforts to promote Egypt abroad.

"Investment funds, as important players in the stock market, fared well during 1996," he stated. "Three new funds were introduced in Egypt, as well as another three abroad, all of which posted substantial yields ranging from 24 to 57 per cent over the year."

Discussing other developments on the capital market this year, Amany Hamed, managing director of the Okaz Stock Brokers and Investment Consultants, pointed out that the number of players on the market increased as new activities, such as equity management funds and underwriting companies, were introduced. Moreover, she noted, the market in the working hours on the market had a positive impact on the volume of trading. "We can now receive more purchase orders from investors in countries in different time zones," said Hamed.

She also cited the increased interest in investing in bonds as another of the year's key trends. Corporate bonds offered through both Citibank and the Egyptian-American Bank, which were floated this year, were snatched up as soon as they hit the market. But trading in bonds, as a whole, was relatively slow as investors were reluctant to sell because the bonds were realising a high yield.

On the whole, while the overall performance of the market during 1996 was good, it was not particularly stable. During the first four months of 1996, the volume of transactions declined and the General Market Index plummeted to 200 points by the end of March — its lowest level since July 1994. This decline was largely due to investors holding back from trading in anticipation of new offerings of public sector companies which the government, in February, said would be floating. Moreover, the first two months of trading coincided with the annual general assembly meetings of a number of the listed companies. These meetings were held to declare the companies' dividends — a factor that slowed down transactions.

But by April, the market was on the rebound as the government offered major stakes in two public sector firms, Heliopolis Housing and Urbanisation Company and the Industrial and Financial Company. These offerings were followed shortly by the long-awaited lifting of the two per cent capital gains tax and the abolishment of the taxes imposed on gains accrued from investment funds.

Focus shift at MENA III

As the third economic conference underscored, it is still politics that determines the future of regional economic cooperation. **Samia Nkrumah** looks back at the Cairo gathering

The year's political developments highlighted the impossibility of separating economics from politics in the Middle East. No sooner had Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing government taken office than the process of normalising relations with Israel was called into question.

At the June Cairo Arab summit, Arab states collectively declared that economic cooperation with Israel hinges on Israel implementing existing agreements. Five months later, at the third Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference (MENA III), the Arab world demonstrated that its political will would not be swayed by external pressures to integrate Israel into the region.

"The conference has to be the event of the year. While it was held amidst negative political developments and against popular sentiment, it was held to prove that no party can hold a veto on the region's development," commented Raouf Saad, Egypt's deputy assistant foreign minister for international cooperation.

MENA III will be remembered as the event in which regional cooperation ceased to be synonymous with Arab-Israeli cooperation. Arab states made it clear that they are slamming the brakes on further normalisation with Israel pending progress in the peace process.

In the aftermath of MENA III, political and economic relations between Arab

states and Israel continue to be marked by suspicion and mistrust. Instead of talk of booming business, of which there was plenty following previous MENA conferences, it was the arrests of Israeli agents suspected of infiltrating the Egyptian private sector which made the headlines recently in Egypt.

The tremendous publicity given the issue, rather than the episodes themselves, which are not unusual, only heightened the psychological barriers still hindering Egyptian-Israeli business relations in the present political climate.

Last month, President Hosni Mubarak said in a press conference that the volume of cooperation between Egyptian and Israeli businessmen is shrinking as a result of Israel's policies, whereas, previously, relations were marked by cooperation, joint projects and the exchange of visits. A similar cooling in ties was evident elsewhere in the Arab world. In Jordan, an exhibition of Israeli goods, scheduled to be held in Amman, was postponed earlier this month after pressure from various political and professional groups.

In the same vein, less than a week after MENA III, Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem Al-Thani visited Gaza. Soon after his trip, Sheikh Hamad received a Palestinian delegation from the Orient House to discuss the question of Jerusalem and to prepare for a cultural

week in the Gulf state, for the city. Qatar, which is hosting the next MENA gathering in 1997, announced at the Cairo economic conference that it will not open a trade representative office in Israel unless there is progress on the Palestinian peace track.

Lack of enthusiasm pervades and is manifested in the slow development of regional institutions requiring Arab-Israeli cooperation. The Middle East-Mediterranean Travel and Tourism Association (MEMTTA) still awaits the endorsement of some regional parties. Similarly, despite authorisation from the US, Russia, Italy and Cyprus, the Middle East Development Bank (MEDB), still lacking the approval of the Gulf states, has yet to become operational. Furthermore, attempts to hold steering meetings of the Regional Business Council (RBC), which relies on private sector participation, have been futile. "Nobody can persuade the private sector to come together without a visible improvement in the political situation," stated the Foreign Ministry's Saad. Prospects for MEMTTA and the MEDB, however, appear to be more promising because they are government-led and subject to existing inter-governmental agreements.

The only Arab-Israeli cooperation sphere that appears to be unaffected by the political turmoil is that of research

and feasibility studies on regional projects. Whatever has been achieved in these initiatives is still there, but "it would be naive to assume that all activities are continuing as usual, unaffected by the political climate, because you need to have a clear vision shared by all parties," said Saad.

In a clear departure from the previous two summits, energies focused on other regional development initiatives rather than on Arab-Israeli cooperation. At Egypt's initiative — regional cooperation was redefined to embrace Arab-Arab cooperation and Euro-Mediterranean cooperation," Saad agreed.

With the spotlight shifting away from Israel, no Arab-Israeli mega-projects materialised from MENA III. Egypt sought other options which are fast moving into the implementation stage. Last week, Egyptian Oil Minister Hamdi El-Banbi announced that the US, Egypt and Italy will fund the \$4 billion mega-project to export Egyptian liquefied natural gas to Turkey. A memorandum of understanding on the project was signed at the summit. "Our economies have grown closer... Yet, this is not close enough, for as long as comprehensive peace on all tracks is not firmly and irreversibly established among us, we will not reap the full benefits of our economic integration."

Arab-Arab cooperation was posited as an essential component of regional cooperation. Public commitment to Arab-Arab integration will only be translated into

collective action if the Arab League plays a more active role in the process, and existing instruments like the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development can be relied on for establishing regional projects. Currently, the League's Arab Economic Council is completing studies on gradually establishing an Arab economic free trade zone.

A healthy orientation also prevailed in the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue at MENA III, where a Euro-Arab matching scheme was introduced for the first time this year. The EU added its voice to that of the Arabs in backing Palestinian rights and putting pressure on Israel to honour its commitments.

Aside from Arab-Israeli affairs, MENA III provided a forum to boost Egypt's economic performance. To this end, Egypt, according to official figures, secured a number of deals worth a total of \$10 billion. Some chose to interpret this as a sign of greater preoccupation with economic performance at the expense of regional cooperation. But as President Mubarak stated in his opening speech at the summit: "Our economies have grown closer... Yet, this is not close enough, for as long as comprehensive peace on all tracks is not firmly and irreversibly established among us, we will not reap the full benefits of our economic integration."

Going, going, but not yet gone

A surge in the privatisation process this year had officials rejoicing at the gains. But, as **Mona El-Fiqi** found out, not everyone was as excited

Under the new government headed by Prime Minister Kamel El-Ganzouri, who was appointed close to the beginning of the year, the privatisation programme has picked up steam.

According to records from the Public Enterprise Office (PEO), a total of 64 companies have been affected by the programme since it was launched in 1991. Of this total figure, the majority shares of 16 were sold through the Capital Market. The majority shares of another six businesses were sold directly to investors, while the majority stake of 10 companies were sold directly to the companies' employees. Further breaking down the total, the majority stake in 11 companies was sold as assets and liquidation while minority shares (up to 40 per cent) of 21 companies were also sold.

This year alone, the surge in the implementation of the privatisation programme was evident as 27 companies were privatised. The majority stake in three public sector companies: Al-Ahram Beverages, Al-Nasr Utilities and Almeco Transformers, were sold to anchor investors. The estimated total value of the shares sold was LE394 million. Tranches

of shares of another 21 companies were offered to the general public and company employees through the stock market.

The government's success to date has not gone unnoticed by the international financial community. Foreign investments have increased and, in October, Egypt and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) finalised an agreement on the second phase of the economic reform programme with the IMF endorsing the government's privatisation plans. By signing the agreement, Egypt obtained a \$4.2 billion debt reduction from the Paris Club of Western Creditors — the third tranche of a 50 per cent debt write-off awarded in Egypt in 1991 when it embarked on a comprehensive economic structural adjustment programme.

Mohamed Hassouma, supervisor of the Evaluation and Financial Analysis Unit at the Public Enterprise Office, said that the proceeds from privatisation, collected over the first half of the year, were deposited in the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) in the name of the holding companies which, by law, are allowed access to these funds as a means of supporting their structure.

"Last July, a decision was taken by the cabinet that the holding companies cannot withdraw any of the proceeds deposited in the CBE without the approval of the privatisation committee headed by the prime minister," Hassouma added.

He explained that these proceeds will be used mainly to pay the public companies' debts to banks, to compensate the affected labour, to restructure financially the loss-making companies in order to facilitate their privatisation and to help the government finance the budget deficit.

According to a plan decided recently by the Ministerial Committee for Privatisation, 15 companies will be privatised during the first three months of 1997. This list includes Nile for Pharmaceuticals and Chemicals, Metallico, Stello, Cairo for Housing, Nobesco, Middle East for Paper, Misr for Hotels and Mide for Chemical Industries. While only 20 per cent of Nile for Pharmaceuticals and El-Sharqia for Tobacco and Cigarettes will be sold, the majority stake in other companies such as Bismoon and Delta Industrial (Ideal) will be offered for sale. Moreover, the PEO's plan calls for the sale of 52 companies

annually over the two coming years.

The execution of the programme has had a distinct effect on the employees of these companies. Hassouma noted that the number of public sector employees declined since the beginning of 1996, from 1.3 million to 900,000. This drop, he said, is related to issues such as retirement, early pension and transferring workers from one company to another.

Although the programme has realised some decided gains in the way of reducing debts, increasing company productivity and profits, the manner in which it was implemented has left some experts wary, despite assurances on the part of privatisation officials.

Gouda Abdel-Khalik, a professor of economics at Cairo University and head of the leftist Tsgammu Party's economic committee, is one of the critics. While not opposed in the programme in principle, Abdel-Khalik has concerns about the way it was implemented.

"First, privatisation is taking place without a clear-cut policy," he noted. "The government has not set any restrictions on the foreign ownership of assets to be privatised. This is a major drawback."

His second reservation concerns the constitutionality of the programme. According to the Egyptian constitution, the public sector is owned by the people, not the government.

"The government is transferring the ownership of public sector assets in private hands without proper authority," stated Abdel-Khalik. "So far, the people have not given the government the right to sell public assets. Therefore, the entire process lacks the requisite transparency."

Moreover, according to Abdel-Khalik, the Central Auditing Authority has criticised the government's policy toward asset evaluation and foreign ownership of these assets.

Privatisation, he stressed, does not only mean the sale of companies, but also the restructuring and leasing of companies to private sector management while the state retains ownership, such as what happened with hotels.

"Selling companies such as the government cooperatives, which sell fruits and vegetables, is inevitable," said Abdel-Khalik. "But selling companies should not be the government's only goal in implementing the privatisation programme."

Rise of the entrepreneurs

1996 was a honeymoon year between a government bent on encouraging private investment, both domestic and foreign, and Egypt's rising class of entrepreneurs. **Gamal Kassab, El-Din** investigates the scope of the businessmen's new-found role as lobbyists.

Since last January's cabinet reshuffle, the Egyptian government has embraced wide-ranging economic policies aimed at encouraging foreign investments and boosting exports. Businessmen, in this age of free enterprise, have been so skilful at influencing the formulation of economic legislation that most economic analysts agree that the government and businessmen are now living a "bright honeymoon". Three influential business associations were particularly successful in promoting the interests of the business community in Egypt.

According to Amrany Qandil, a prominent researcher at the National Centre for Sociological and Criminal Research, the Egyptian Businessmen's Association (EBA) is the most active of business groups currently lobbying for liberalisation and market economics in Egypt. "Although EBA was first established in July 1979 as an association merely calling for more liberalised economic policies, now, 17 years later, it has been able to constitute a strong lobby to cater to the interests of the private sector and assume a greater say in formulating policy," said Qandil.

According to him, the members of EBA were able to strengthen their influence as a lobbying group through a number of effective political moves. Foremost among them, he added, were joining the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) and becoming an influential force within its economic committee. EBA, adds Qandil, has acted to encourage the creation of businessmen's associations in almost all Egyptian governorates and granted honorary membership to a large number of influential former ministers and leading public sector officials. For example, former ministers such as Fouad Sultan (tourism), Abdel-Aziz Hegazi (prime minister), Fouad Abul Zeha (industry), Osman Ahmed-Osman (housing) and Gamal El-Nasser (international cooperation) are all EBA members.

Not only does EBA dominate most of the investors' associations in new industrial communities (such as the cities of Tenth of Ramadan and Sixth of October), but also a large number of its members are leading members of the influential Federation of Egyptian Industries. Right now, said Qandil, EBA includes around 600 influential figures and has been able to establish strong joint business councils with around 15 countries.

In 1996, EBA and business associations in other governorates were able to form yet another influential lobby to promote free economy legislation. Seventy-two of its members not only were able to win seats in parliament (37 in the People's Assembly and 35 in the Shura Council), but also to assume leading positions in some of the key parliamentary committees. The 57-member strong economic committee of the People's Assembly includes 14 EBA members active in banking, foreign exchange, commercial agency, insurance and other economic spheres.

Mustafa El-Said, former minister of economy and EBA member, "thinks the committee while one of its deputies, Abdel-Wahab Qouta, is chairman of Port Said's Businessmen's Association. The 27-member planning and budget committee includes 11 EBA businessmen. Tawfik Abdul Ismail, a former Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister, chairs the committee while one of its deputies, Mahmoud Abul-Nasr, is a leading EBA member. Eleven others, many of them private contractors, are serving on the 53-member housing committee. This committee's deputy chairman, Talaat Mustafa, is also deputy chairman of Alexandria's Businessmen's Association. Ten businessmen, most of them industrialists, are serving on the 46-member industry committee. The Manpower Committee is chaired by Abdel-Aziz Mustafa, an EBA member and former chairman of a public-sector insurance company. Likewise, in the Shura Council, EBA's leading member Mohamed Farid Khamis is chairman of the Council's Industry Committee.

EBA wholeheartedly welcomed the cabinet reshuffle in January, especially because of the appointment of Mohamed El-Gharbi, former chairman of the investment authority, as Finance Minister. EBA representatives soon held a meeting with him and submitted a detailed memorandum containing their requests on economic policies, which he promised to implement. As a result, EBA's members of parliament are said to have been a major driving force behind 35 laws opening new fields of investment for local and foreign private investors (such as allowing private investors to build roads, airports and electric power stations). Recently, it is claimed, they were able to prevail on the government to revise a new investment incentive draft law to cancel an article that allows nationalisation "for the sake of the public good and with adequate compensation."

According to Amrany Qandil, the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) is another influential business group in Egypt. She said that AmCham, which was established in October 1981, aims to represent the views of American businessmen in Egypt and to maintain a line of communication between businessmen and the Egyptian government to help improve the atmosphere for "business in Egypt". Its lobbying methods range from holding luncheons and roundtable meetings where famous figures and high-ranking officials emphasise the government's commitment to market-oriented economics. For example, AmCham invited the new Economy Minister, Nawal El-Tanawy, to speak on 26 February this year. The minister emphasised that the government "will offer more attractive investment incentives to both foreign and local investors."

AmCham also organises an annual "Door Knock" visit to the United States, in which the ministers of finance and economy and the minister for cabinet affairs dealing with economy participated in 1996. The three ministers emphasised to American officials Egypt's commitment to liberalisation policies, citing the past foreign investment laws and revealing the ones to come. While around eight of AmCham's members also won seats in parliament, AmCham's president Shadi Gabr, an agent of 23 American companies in Egypt, enjoys an influential position among businessmen due to his membership in the US-Egypt Presidents' Council, the most influential business group in Egypt at present.

This Council was founded on 6 September, 1994, as part of the US-Egypt Partnership for Economic Development and Growth and acts as an adviser to the presidents of Egypt and the US to encourage mutual investments. In addition to 15 American businessmen, most of them with businesses in Egypt and the Middle East, it includes some 15 very influential Egyptian businessmen. The Council's role was evident in economic legislation as it was behind the 12 foreign investment laws passed in 1996.

Council member Mohamed Abul-Enein, also a member of parliament, however, emphasised to the Assembly that the Council only has an advisory role. "We just submit economic proposals, but it is the 'political leadership' that has the final say on them," Abul-Enein said.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

Opening the trade gates

Balancing its international obligations with the interests of local producers, the Egyptian government continued to lower trade restrictions throughout 1996.

Only a week into January, an announcement was made reducing customs on certain capital goods to 10 per cent. The list included 25 items, among which were engines, electric transformers and tractors. Later on in the year, just days before a deal was sealed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in October, the maximum rate of customs tariffs on all industrial and agricultural goods except cars and alcoholic drinks was lowered to 55 per cent, down from 70 per cent. The maximum customs tariff for cars was brought down from 160 to 135 per cent.

These latest reductions effect, foremost among local industries, the car industry, which until recently enjoyed a high degree of tariff protection. The government has imposed a 15 per cent sales tax on cars with engines of over 2000cc, to make up for the revenues lost because of reduced customs charges.

The reductions come as part of the government's commitment to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and to its recent accord with the IMF. Under GATT, Egypt is required to dismantle barriers to trade during a 10-year transitional period. The speed and degree of customs reductions varies from one product to another. Under the agreement with the IMF and the World Bank, the maximum tariff rate must be lowered to 40 per cent, and all non-tariff barriers must be eliminated by the end of the structural adjustment programme.

The government has made the customs reductions not only to keep its word to the international community, but also to motivate local producers by exposing them to competition, to improve the quality of their products and to reduce prices.

However, the reductions in tariffs are angering local producers because they cut the prices of imported goods. "With the customs reductions, imported goods end up having the same price as locally produced goods," said Mahmoud Mukhtar, deputy chairman of Egyptian Car Makers Co. "A citizen with a choice between imported and locally produced goods at the same price will pick the imported item."

He gave the example of air conditioners, which when imported by tourist development companies are exempt from any customs duties, making them half the price of locally produced ones. "In this case, why should they buy a locally produced

air conditioner which costs double the price?" he said.

Mukhtar demanded that customs duties be lowered on production inputs rather than on finished products. As a producer, he pays customs charges that range from 30 to 60 per cent on production inputs and raw materials. These should be totally cancelled to put local industries on an equal footing with foreign ones," he said.

According to Mukhtar, if the government does not slow down the tariff reduction process, people will stop investing in local industries and many workers will consequently be laid off. He said that his company, for example, started local production of Citroen cars about four years ago. At that time, the legislation was different and protected local industry better. "Why should I remain in business if I end up being a loser?" he asked, blaming GATT for the situation his company finds itself in today.

Mohamed Ma'moun, chief Egyptian negotiator with GATT from 1987 to '91, and member of the negotiating team to date, believes, on the other hand, that gradual lifting of excessive protection helps upgrade local industries. "They may suffer in the short run, but in the end, they survive and become more competitive," he said. He gave the example of Egypt's ceramics industry, which according to him competes today with those from Italy and Spain — two countries renowned for their high-quality ceramics production.

Ma'moun denied accusations that GATT is the cause of the continual tariff reductions. "The idea that the cuts made by the government are required by GATT is absolutely untrue because Egypt has already fulfilled its commitments towards GATT," he said.

Ma'moun said that when Egypt was admitted into the World Trade Organisation, it was required to present a list of the tariff cuts it would make, as well as commitments in the field of services. Egypt agreed that, by the year 2004, the maximum rate of customs tariffs on everything except cars and alcoholic drinks would be reduced to 60 per cent. Egypt has lowered tariffs to below this mark because of its agreement with the IMF and the World Bank, he stressed.

Ma'moun said that the number of products

which have an import ban on them in Egypt has been drastically reduced. Today, only two items — textiles and ready-made garments — receive such protection. Usually, when a country signs GATT, all import bans must be lifted. Egypt, however, was able to maintain a ban on textiles and ready-made garments, which will end in 1998 and 2002 respectively.

Egypt's poultry industry used to be protected by an import ban. Under GATT, the Egyptian government has lifted quantitative restrictions, but im-

portant to carry out the arbitration of complaints, has failed to materialise.

Another supporter of government policy is Mohamed Abdel-Fattah Ragab, a car importer and head of the Alexandria Businessmen's Association. He believes that the government's tariff reductions will, in the end, be beneficial to the consumer, who will have a wider choice and be able to pick the best quality at the lowest price.

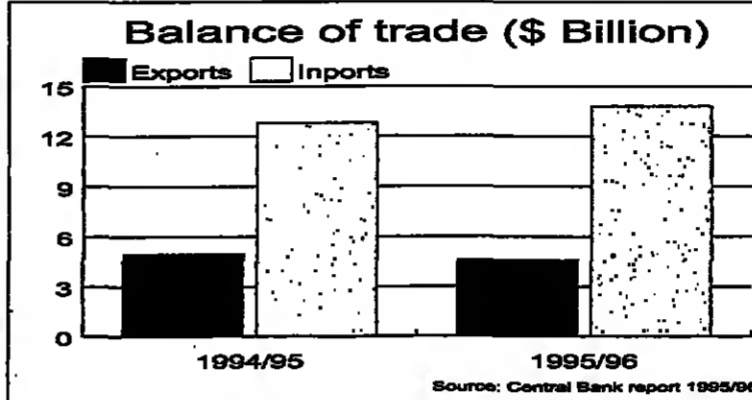
In Ragab's opinion, those businessmen who complain that local industry will suffer are very narrow-minded because

excessive protection in the past few years has resulted in the deterioration of quality due to a lack of competition. "We must take into consideration the fact that all barriers will soon be lifted and only the best quality at the best price will survive. This will only be achievable through competition," he said.

Egypt is currently negotiating the creation of an Egyptian-European Union free trade area under what is called the Egypt-EU partnership, an agreement which also encompasses cultural, scientific and technological cooperation. While over 90 per cent of the agreement has been approved by both sides, the issue of agriculture has prevented it being signed.

Egypt wants its agricultural products to receive the same treatment as industrial products and to enter the EU market without tariffs or quota limits. The EU, due to the Common Agricultural Policy, refuses to grant agricultural products and processed foods the same terms as industrial products, insisting on imposing customs and specifying quotas for each agricultural crop. Both sides had hoped to sign an agreement in 1996, but this was not possible. "We will only sign when the agreement is satisfactory," said Gamal Bayoumi, head of Egypt's negotiating team.

During President Hosni Mubarak's visit to the United States in August, the idea of creating an Egyptian-US free trade area was put forward. However, nothing has materialised yet. In an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Ibrahim Kamel, head of the Egyptian side in the joint Egyptian-US Presidents' Council, had said: "We are now favouring an approach whereby we increase the flow of trade between our two countries without necessarily entering into a free trade area."



Waiting for the 'trickle down' effect

The economy is growing, economic reforms are bearing fruit, foreign investments are coming in as never before. But for the average middle and lower class Egyptian, the benefits are yet to 'trickle down', as Amira Howeidy finds out

"If anything has changed over the past year, then it is only the cabinet," said Rashed Sana'i, a 30-year-old security employee at the Abdeen Local Council and the father of three children.

Since Prime Minister Kamel El-Ganzour took office and formed his cabinet last January, the promise of improved living standards has become a familiar theme in the press. The government's reform programme has been lauded for minimising the social cost of economic reform and the conversion to a free market economy. So far, the government has stood firm by its decision not to lift subsidies on bread and other essential foodstuffs, by making available at competitive prices grain and sugar, subsidising public transportation, continuing to raise periodically the salaries of some three million government employees in limited income brackets and providing free education up to the university level.

"The average lower and middle class Egyptian is yet to feel the benefits of the promised 'trickle down' effect of economic reform and structural adjustment, however."

Despite the decline in the inflation rate over the past year, the prices of most goods, whether local or imported, have remained out of reach for Sana'i and many others like him, who fall within the limited income bracket. To many, promises of prosperity and better living standards still seem to be little more than "newspaper talk."

"At the moment," he says, "my monthly salary plus bonus reaches LE100-125, roughly the price of a pair of shoes," laments Sana'i.

And with the cost of living going nowhere but up, he finds himself increasingly uncertain about the kind of future his three children will face. Given his limited income, Sana'i doubts whether he will be able to afford sending his children, who are currently enrolled in state schools, to university.

"The government could be sincere in its effort to improve things, and the figures they give of economic improvement may be true," he said. "But what do they have to do with people like me?"

Opinions on the effect of the reform programme on the average Egyptian, of course, vary from one to another. When questioned about the issue, one shop owner asserted that prices had actually gone down over the last year as a result of a sales slump. This, however, does not mean that peoples' standards of living are improving.

"I can't really blame the customers," said the owner of a ready-made clothing shop who preferred to remain anonymous. "They don't have any money. We tried improving matters by reducing prices, but it didn't work. Business is no longer profitable."

The men's suits at the shop boasted a hefty LE600 price tag — a figure that, for the average Egyptian, is astronomical.

"Everything is getting so expensive, and one just can't keep up," said Nadia Karim. Her husband, an engineer with the Ministry of Economy, brings home roughly LE550 per month. According to Karim, they barely make ends meet each month. "If this is economic reform, then what is under development," she quipped.

Karim's concerns have been echoed by the growing sense of insecurity among nearly a million employees working employed in former public sector companies currently undergoing privatisation.

In what had been a socialist economy for more than thirty years, the expected changes in labour laws, designed to meet the needs of a market economy, have further eroded the sense of security for

the employees of state enterprises that have been or are to be privatised.

Despite repeated government assurances that their careers would not be jeopardised as a result of privatisation, many of these employees, such as Salah Abdallah, a salesman with the Omar Effendi chain of department stores for the past 19 years, are uncertain what to make of a future in the private sector that could bring with it the possibility of dismissal or early retirement.

With Omar Effendi being listed as one of several public sector enterprises to be privatised, Abdallah did not know what to make of the government's decision.

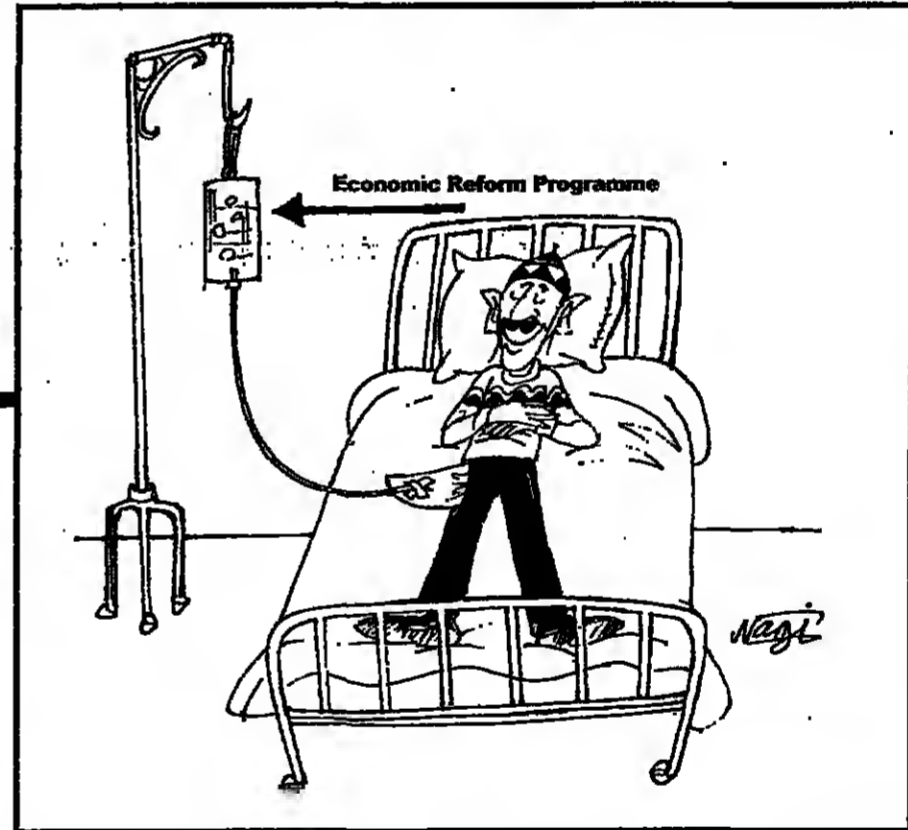
"My main problem is that I don't know what privatisation really is," he said. "None of us here has the slightest idea what will happen to us. Although government officials have repeatedly assured the people that public sector employees will not be harmed once a company is privatised, we have heard shocking stories about workers forced into early retirement once the company is sold."

For Abdallah, early retirement would be a financial crisis of death. Currently, he earns LE300 per month as a base salary and, with commissions, sees that figure double. But should he be forced to retire, his pay would be drastically reduced, making it next to impossible to support his family of eight.

"My pension will be calculated on the basis of my basic salary only. Without the commission, how can we live?" he asked.

Nearly 12,000 other Omar Effendi employees are in the same boat. With few skills to boast of other than sales, many of them would have little option "but to steal" in order to make a living, said Youssef Habib, a salesman in the state-run department store's electrical appliance department.

Fifty-five-year-old Fatma El-Halw, head of the personnel affairs department at the Alexandria branch of the public sector Misr Import-Export Company, alleges that since the government announced its privatisation plans, company officials have launched an "exodus campaign" indirectly forcing workers to resign or request early retirement. "El-



Halw also maintains that she has endured "intolerable pressure such as being forced to take vacations or threatened with bad reports which would tarnish her 34-year-long career" with the company. While cases like El-Halw's may not be on the government's agenda, younger employees whose early retirement will mean to an insignificant pen-

sion are more likely to be catered for. In an effort to offset the negative effects of privatisation, the Social Fund for Development has launched a programme for retraining nearly 1,000 former public sector employees, and expects to create nearly 50,000 permanent jobs and 20,000 temporary jobs annually between 1997 and 2000.

Le dernier réveillon avant l'an 2000

1996

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Mohamed Salmawy

Président et Rédacteur en Chef
Ibrahim Nafie

Peace receding, violence looming

For the Palestinians trying to make peace with Israel, 1996 began on a note of great hope but ended with a feeling of almost complete despair. **Graham Usher** in Jerusalem traces the sharp dip in Middle East peace prospects

For Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, 1996 will be remembered as the year in which the national aspirations invested in the Oslo peace process were heightened only to be betrayed. As of then with Oslo, the rupture was caused less by the ambiguous terms of the accords than by events which showed the fragility of the Palestinian-Israeli consensus built on those terms.

The year began well. Buoyed by the Israeli army's redeployment from six West Bank cities on 20 January, Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza took part in general elections for the Palestinian National Council (PNC), the body authorised to legislate Palestinian self-government during Oslo's three year interim period. Despite a boycott of the poll by Palestinian groups belonging to the Islamist and PLO opposition and some minor rigging, a turnout of nearly 80 percent delivered a massive endorsement of the Oslo process and Yasser Arafat's leadership of it.

Candidates from Arafat's pro-Oslo Fatah movement won 50 out of the 88 PNC seats, with Arafat garnering a 87 per cent mandate for the presidency. Coupled with the pro-Oslo sentiment in Israel generated after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the PLO leader could look forward to a Labour victory in the Israeli elections and, with it, progress to Oslo's critical final status negotiations on Jerusalem, settlements, refugees and borders.

These hopes took a month to sour. Islamist-inspired suicide attacks in Israel in February and March left 58 Israeli civilians dead and over 200 wounded. After the first wave of attacks, then Israeli Prime Minister (PM) Shimon Peres, suspended all negotiations with the Palestinian Authority (PA). After the second, he authorised the severest closure ever imposed on the Occupied Territories. A return to the Oslo process, said Peres, was conditional on the PA routing out Hamas' "terrorist infrastructure in the self-rule areas" and on PNC changing the Palestine Covenant.

Confronted with the gravest crisis yet to his rule, Arafat obliged, but at enormous cost to his, the PA's and Oslo's legitimacy. Over the next three months, PA security forces in the West Bank and Gaza arrested 1,200 Palestinians for their suspected Islamist affiliation, raided 30 Palestinian institutions and took control of 59 mosques in Gaza, with little care for the niceties of due process. On 24 April, Arafat mustered a majority at the PNC in Gaza to change those articles of Covenant which deny Israel's right to exist, yet without eliciting from Israel any reciprocal acknowledgment of Palestinian rights to self-determination and return. The PLO leader also agreed quietly with Peres to shelve until after the Israeli elections the army's partial redeployment in Hebron, the last of the West Bank cities to be trans-

ferred to PA control under Oslo's interim agreement.

To no avail. On 28 May, 51 percent of the Israeli electorate (and 55 percent of the Israeli Jewish vote) returned the Likud leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, as Israel's first directly elected PM, with a 65-seat majority in the 120-member Knesset. Likud's blueprint for Palestinian self-government was spelled out. Its governmental guidelines: no to a Palestinian state, no shared sovereignty in Jerusalem, no right of return for Palestinian refugees to either Israel or the Occupied Territories and no ending of Jewish settlement, whether in the "Galilee and the Negev" or "Judea, Samaria," (i.e. the West Bank) "Gaza and the Golan Heights".

With Likud in power, Arafat initially pursued the same policy of strict adherence to Oslo as he had with Labour. At Netanyahu's behest, he shut down three PA offices in Jerusalem, despite the Israeli leader's stonewalling on Hebron. But Arafat also worked to revive his position among the Arab states, strengthening ties with Egypt, and, at long last, making an effort to thaw the frigid relations between the PA and Syria.

Neither posture cut it with Netanyahu. On 2 August, the Israeli cabinet "unfroze" settlement construction in the West Bank and Gaza. One day after the PA closed its offices in occupied East Jerusalem, Israel ordered the demolition of a Palestinian welfare centre in Jerusalem's old city and announced the building of 900 new units for a West Bank settlement near Ramallah. "Israel has declared war on us," raged Arafat, authorising, for the first time since the Oslo Agreement, a general strike in the Occupied Territories and calling on Palestinians to worship at their holy sites in Jerusalem, defying Israel's three-year closure of the city.

The general strike was observed. But the "mass protest" in Jerusalem drew a derisory response. This was partly due to the siege Israel slapped on the city. But there were other reasons.

Even before Likud's victory, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were growing disenchanted with the PA's ruthless compliance with Israel's security dictates. After Netanyahu's take-over, they began to vent their frustration against a "national" authority that was deferential to Israel's "concerns" in the occupied territories but paid scant regard to their own. Following the brutal killing of a Fatah activist in a PA prison, Palestinians in Nabulus and Tulkarm took to the streets in protest. For many, the failed Jerusalem protest was testimony to the PA's loss of support on the Palestinian street.

Netanyahu's decision, on 23 September, to open an archaeological tunnel beside Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque gave Arafat the chance to regain popular backing. Prompted by PNC members and Fatah ac-

tivists, he called on Palestinians to protest Israel's "crime against our sacred places." He didn't tell them how to protest. After 29 years of occupation and six years of the Intifada he didn't need to.

Over the next four days, confrontations raged throughout the Occupied Territories, with the Israeli and PA military forces engaging in full-scale gun battles in Ramallah, Nabulus, Bethlehem and Rafah. It was the worst violence in the territories since the occupation started, leaving a toll of 95 dead (80 of them Palestinian) and over 1,000 wounded. Palestinians took on the might of the Israeli army not to "kill the Oslo process," said West Bank Fatah leader Marwan Barghout, "but to restore it to life."

Three months on, the resuscitation has yet to come. Despite the PA's renewed standing internationally, there is still no movement on the Hebron redeployment. Nor have the confrontations deflected Likud from its colonial ambitions in the West Bank. On 13 December the cabinet decided to grant all settlements the status of "national priority" areas, angling, if not new settlements, then a rapid inflow of settlers to join the 145,000 that already reside illegally in the West Bank and Gaza. Arafat ended the year calling on his people "to stand strongly to face the challenge of Netanyahu's policies and to defend the land."

Three years after the historical handshake, the Oslo process is at an impasse. Its rescue is dependent on overhauling Israel's present policies, which, in practice, would probably mean an overhaul of its present government. Without this, the prospect is less peace than renewed confrontations with the most powerful indigenous army in the Middle East pitted against a lightly armed Palestinian militia, scattered among the PA's seven autonomous areas. It is a scenario that no Israeli government could possibly tolerate. And neither, as 1996 showed, will the Palestinians.

Lebanon's fragile road to recovery

As Lebanon continues on the road to recovery after years of war, the threat of instability lingers due to Israel's occupation of territory in south Lebanon. **Zeina Khodr** reports

Last April, a 17-day Israeli air, artillery and naval bombardment left almost 200 civilians dead, mainly women and children, over 400 wounded and material destruction which amounted to nearly 500 million dollars. In 1996, the south-erners paid a heavy price in life and infrastructure during the Israeli onslaught. Additionally, many reconstruction projects were put on hold and the national economy was negatively affected because investor confidence was shaken.

development projects over the next five years, but this did not materialise. The conference, however, was hailed as a success since it manifested international confidence in the country and its growing economy.

The Lebanese and the world at large are unlikely to forget the gruesome television images of charred women and children caused by Israeli gunners slamming dozens of shells into a UN base in Qana, south Lebanon. More than 100 refugees who had taken shelter at the base were killed on April 18. The Qana massacre and the other Israeli atrocities were condemned by the international community and turned international public opinion against Israel.

On 26 April, the cease-fire understanding was reached, a written but unsigned accord between Lebanon and Israel. In a bid to protect civilians, it barred the combatants, the Israeli occupying forces as well as resistance guerrillas from launching attacks on or from civilian areas. But it sanctioned military operations against Israeli forces occupying a border strip in south Lebanon.

The understanding also gave birth to a five-nation cease-fire monitoring group formed to supervise the truce. The group is made up of representatives from the United States, France, Lebanon, Syria and Israel. The group has held several meetings since it was formed last August to look into complaints of cease-fire violations.

The group has blamed Israel three times for wounding civilians when its forces shelled southern villages. It also recently acknowledged that at least one Katyusha rocket fired from south Lebanon slammed into northern Israel without holding Lebanon responsible. No one has so far claimed responsibility for the alleged attack. Despite the fact that the monitoring group was established with the aim of curtailing attacks in the south

of Lebanon, it is unable to ensure that security and stability will prevail. "The group's presence is progress in itself," deputy Nassib Lahoud told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "It is the first time the world acknowledges Israeli atrocities in south Lebanon. Of course, it would be better if the group could take action against Israel once it violates the cease-fire."

As efforts continue to ensure that the situation in south Lebanon remains under control, progress on the peace track were not significant this year. The Lebanese-Israeli track of negotiations had been frozen even before the accession of the right-wing government in Israel. Chances of talks resuming are slim since the new Likud government refuses to respect the principle of exchanging land for peace.

Progress on the Lebanese front is directly related in the Syrian peace track. The two countries coordinate peace moves. Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri recently said: "Syria and Lebanon will not sign a peace agreement with Israel separately from each other." Damascus is the main power broker in Lebanon. In 1996, the US and Israel tried to pressure Damascus to make concessions and to exert pressure on Hizbullah resistance guerrillas in south Lebanon, but Damascus did not budge.

Israeli officials also have unsuccessfully tried to drive a wedge between Beirut and Damascus. Last July, Israel propounded the Lebanon-first proposal. Lebanon and Syria rejected the offer to resume talks without conditions despite the fact that Israel stated it was ready to withdraw from south Lebanon before signing peace with Syria. It also said it would withdraw under a deal to be negotiated with Syria, if Syrian troops also left Lebanon and if the Lebanese army guarantees Israel's security against guerrilla attacks.

Tension heightened last October. Syria re-deployed at least 12,000 troops, a third of its forces in Lebanon, to the Bekaa near the Syrian border. The Israeli media highlighted the movements as plausible indications that Syria, frustrated over deadlocked peace talks, might be preparing an attack against Israel. But Syria denied that the troop movement from the Bekaa closer to the Israeli-occupied Golan amounted to a prelude to an attack on Israel.

The stalemate in peace negotiations and the military conflict in south Lebanon pose the continuing threat of instability in the region and hamper Lebanon's drive to rebuild what was destroyed in its 15-year civil war. South Lebanon and Lebanon's future remain hostage to the peace process. Israel's illegal occupation of land serves as a major stumbling block on the road to Lebanon's recovery.



photo:AFP

Despite all this, Lebanon managed to get back on its feet. In fact, Lebanon secured over 3 billion dollars in loans and grants during the "Friends of Lebanon" conference in Washington on December 16. This conference was part of the April cease-fire understanding which put an end to the Israeli "Operation Grapes of Wrath." The Lebanese government had hoped to obtain 5 billion dollars to finance 31 infrastructure and

blamed Israel three times for wounding civilians when its forces shelled southern villages. It also recently acknowledged that at least one Katyusha rocket fired from south Lebanon slammed into northern Israel without holding Lebanon responsible. No one has so far claimed responsibility for the alleged attack. Despite the fact that the monitoring group was established with the aim of curtailing attacks in the south



photo:Reuters

Test year for Zeroual

Algerians lived through their fifth tragic year in a row. **Amira Howeldy** casts an eye over the major events in a turbulent twelve months

If anything happened in Algeria this year, it involved, revolved around or was orchestrated by President Liamine Zeroual. The military leader did not need more than a few months to remodel the political landscape to suit the army's hard-liners after he was elected in November last year. The "big promises" which accompanied the presidential elections had fostered hopes for real change. The only change that took place, however, was a limited cabinet reshuffle. It included Islamist faces but came as a disappointment to many who felt it did not respond to the hopes of the majority of Algerians. Only a few months before, Zeroual was promising political stability and peace and a few months later, the opposite was taking place.

The escalation of violence in the political arena was mirrored in the divisions that occurred within the once strong opposition front. The powerful former ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN), witnessed significant changes starting with its change of leadership from the flamboyant Abdel-Hamid Mehri to Bou Allam Ben Hammouda, a pro-government figure and former cabinet minister.

When former president Chadli Ben Djedid instituted a new constitution in 1989 allowing a multi-party system, the FLN started to disassociate itself from the ruling regime. Afterwards, the FLN, under Mehri's leadership, enjoyed a measure of political independence and gradually joined forces with the opposition parties. This was clearly evident in the leading role it played in the formulation of the "National Charter" declaration, or the "Rome Understanding", which was signed by Algeria's five main political parties. The charter called for the separation of the army from the republic's political affairs and the release of all political prisoners, including the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) leaders. The document triggered the fury of the Algerian regime. The group was de-

scribed as "traitors" by the government-run TV and radio stations. The charter's signatories were the FIS, the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), the Front for Socialist Forces (FFS), El-Nahda and the Movement for the Democracy of Algeria (MDA). Nevertheless, the opposition from pursued its criticism of the situation in Algeria. They even decided to boycott the presidential elections and called on their followers to do the same.

This vigour did not last too long, however. By overthrowing Mehri, the FLN's new leadership sent a new message; it was not going to pursue the role of the "opposition" party any further. Rather, the party drew closer to the government, probably even closer to the powers-that-be than when it was Algeria's only political authority. The first statement of the new secretary-general, Ben-Hammouda, was that the "Rome group is outdated."

Despite the fact that Zeroual had led all the bilateral talks with the FIS when he was defence minister, his first action upon becoming president was to cancel all contact with the banned party. When he opened the fourth round of national dialogue, Zeroual went even further by boldly declaring that "the FIS file is closed." The dialogue led nowhere and the level of violence became worse.

To observers, closing or opening the file is not the way out from Algeria's five-year drama. After the FIS leaders were arrested in 1992, after the resurgence of violence which followed the cancellation of the parliamentary elections they were poised to win, a large number of armed sub-factions emerged, totally out of the control of the mother party, the FIS. According to unofficial sources, 80,000 have been killed in violence since then.

Zeroual's bid to end the violence by dropping it from the political agenda and leaving it to the army, has not borne fruit. More and more victims, civilians, fundamentalists and police, are killed

every day. According to non-official human rights organisations, the death toll in Algeria reached its peak in '96. The brutal murder of seven French monks last March might be the most poignant since 1992. It was followed a few months later by the assassination of a French Bishop and a wave of renewed violence which was coupled with the appointment of the Armed Islamic Group's (GIA) new emir, Antar Al-Zawarbi, a former officer in the Algerian army.

In the meantime, Zeroual opened the fourth round of national dialogue in Algiers when a bomb exploded 40km away killing five people and injuring 30 others. Although violence was then close, the talks continued, ignoring the issue altogether and focusing on Zeroual's suggestions for "amending" the new constitution. The amendments, which in reality turned out to be a new constitution altogether, were unwelcome by Algeria's main political parties. Their representatives participated in the dialogue in the hope of convincing Zeroual to dismiss the idea altogether.

Their attempts failed. And while Algerians were celebrating the 42nd anniversary of their independence, Zeroual announced the date of the public referendum on the constitutional amendments to be November 28. According to Zeroual, the aim of the new constitution was to "guarantee the right to establish political parties and enhance political stability." But Article 42 of the new constitution stipulates that "it is prohibited to establish political parties based on religious, linguistic, ethnic or professional foundations." The new constitution also prohibits the "exploitation" of Algeria's Arab, Islamic or Amazeghian (Berber) identity in partisan propaganda. The most significant change, however, is that the new constitution grants sweeping powers to the president and allows for the renewal of his five-year term.

The amendments are a de facto ban on Islamist parties and will

force approximately 18 currently legal parties, including the FFS and RCD, to change their focus and founding principles within one year in order not to run foul of the constitution. Observers, however, do not count heavily on the success of Zeroual's bid in the new amendments in the constitution encourage the return of the pre 1989 one-party system, but they also sanction further legal and constitutional violations. The new constitution stipulates the establishment of an appointed "Umma Council", besides the existing National Popular Council (NPC), and gives the elected president the authority to issue laws and special decrees without the approval of the parliament.

As the day of the referendum drew closer, leaders of the major political parties continued to voice their public criticism of Zeroual for making such unconstitutional amendments. According to Article 163 of the 1989 Constitution, any revision of the constitution has to be voted on by the "elected" national council, which Algeria does not have since the 1992 insurrection.

Nevertheless, the referendum was held and the results revealed a very high voter turnout, of which 85 percent registered a "yes" vote. Most opposition party leaders, shocked by the results, have questioned the validity of the polls.

Twelve months ago, Zeroual was celebrating his victory as the first elected president since the start of the crisis in 1992. A year later, he is struggling with a puzzle-like political situation that will be further complicated by the upcoming legislative elections. Additionally, he has to face serious economic problems: the drastic drop of one quarter in the GDP, the increase in the rate of inflation and a 37 billion dollar debt that his government has to pay, or try to re-schedule with the Paris Club of Creditors next January.



Who will guide Iran?

The run-up to next year's Iranian presidential elections is likely to see Iran caught in the middle of a bitter struggle between President Rafsanjani and Ayatollah Khamene'i, writes **Safa Haeri**

The coming year is set to be a significant one, if not an important turning point, for the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Gulf region and the rest of the Middle East. On the one hand, Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, probably the most enigmatic, mysterious, yet powerful statesman and pillar of the Islamic regime of Iran, may bow out of office in June, after 17 years near or at the helm of the nation. On the other, the United States will have to go ahead with the implementation of the controversial D'Amato Law, which aims at preventing all governments and companies from investing more than \$40 million in Iran. The law is likely not only to bring to the boil America's present Cold War-like relations with Tehran, but also to escalate tensions between the US and its major allies in Europe, Asia and South America.

During a recent conference organised by the London-based Royal Institute for International Affairs on the Persian Gulf, non-governmental, but heavyweight American delegates reminded the equally non-governmental European participants from Britain, France, Germany and Russia that the new Clinton administration has no choice other than to apply both the D'Amato Law against Iran and Libya and the Helms-Burton Law against Cuba. The European delegates were all very critical of recent unilateral decisions by the US.

The main battle between America and Europeans is the one which pits the controversial German-led European Union policy of "critical dialogue" with Iran against American efforts to contain the regime. "The EU's basic stance in the Gulf and elsewhere differs from that of the US: Europe believes more in maintaining critical dialogue, even with unfriendly regimes, than in the virtue of isolating or cornering these countries. The lesson Europe learnt from its conflict with the USSR and its allies has been: always keep communication channels open," observed Eberhard Rhein, former director of the European Commission for the Mediterranean, Near and Middle East.

Generally speaking, the Europeans consider that the policy of containment "has turned out to be a failure," in the words of Eric Rouleau, a French journalist-turned-diplomat and leading Middle East commentator. "Iran is certainly not the ideal partner, but one has to continue to have a dialogue with it if one wants to bring about a change in Tehran's attitude," said Michael Stummer, a director of the Research Institute for International Affairs in Ebenhausen, Germany.

Pro-sanction American analysts reject these accusations, seeing the European commentators' insistence on dialogue with Iran as wishful thinking. "Iran is an exercise in futility. Patrick Clawson of the US Institute for National Strategic Studies reminds these Europeans who argue that unilateral sanctions never work that during their first year, sanctions against Iran cost Tehran \$2 billion. "The sanctions have been much more effective than anyone expected," he said.

"All critical dialogue has produced since it was introduced is that more than 50 dissident Iranians have been assassinated by Iranian hit squads on European soil," said Gregg Rickman, legislative director for Republican Senator Alfonse D'Amato.

To Europeans who wish to see US sanctions amended because of mounting world pressure, Rickman points out that he cannot see why the D'Amato and Helms-Burton laws should be amended since the same Senate and House of Representatives which passed them have refused to work.

"With the passage of the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996, the concept of the economic containment of these rogue states being a direct threat to the US became enshrined in US foreign policy," Rickman noted.

The Americans are irritated by the criticism levelled against them by their European allies. "We always hear people asking us why we don't want to talk to the Iranians, but nobody asks why it is that the Iranians never agree to talk to us," said Clawson in London. "North Korea talked to us and obtained \$4 billion. Iran could have gained much more if it, too, had agreed to talk to us."

In fact, different US administrations have tried hard to open a dialogue with post-Revolution Iran, but without the slightest success. Some months ago Robert Pelletreau, US assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, reiterated Washington's "readiness" to meet Iranian officials.

But Iran's real problem with Washington is that any normalisation with the US was ruled out by the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, whose fanatical decisions remain very much in force. No one in Tehran — even the present "supreme leader", Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i — has the courage to remove or even change them. For this reason, all attempts, however timid and indirect, made by President Rafsanjani to open a channel with Washington have been immediately crushed by the radicals, led by Ayatollah Khamene'i.

The US administration has recently been forced to look for new ways of containing Iran, realising the impossibility of creating a viable, credible and efficient opposition to President Saddam Hussein. This year the world watched the lamentable spectacle of fratricidal fighting in northern Iraq between Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, backed by Iran, and Massoud Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party, which has support from Baghdad. Recently, there have been rumours concerning new contacts being established between Israeli and Iraqi "private citizens" in an unidentified Mediterranean country.

One must remember that the "dual containment" of Iran and Iraq, as it was first conceived, was seen as potentially dangerous in that it might draw the two "rogue enemies" closer, despite the fact that one has a basically religious-based regime and the other a secular system.

The next presidential elections in Iran will mark the beginning of a new era for the country, affecting, naturally, its foreign relations. The most important feature of the elections will be that they will bring to an end the present situation of a constant, bitter feud between Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i and President Hashemi Rafsanjani. The former, a poor caricature of Ayatollah Khomeini and for whom the Ayatollah Khomeini's robes and mantle are too big, lacks both religious legitimacy and political skills, yet sits on a "divine" chair where all powers converge. Khamene'i has ruled out any possibility of Rafsanjani, a political animal and a true disciple of Machiavelli, being allowed to try for a third mandate.

Inspired by the American constitution, the Iranian one does not allow any president to run for more than two terms of four years each. The persistent efforts of pro-Rafsanjani factions to persuade Ayatollah Khamene'i to agree to an amendment to extend the maximum term permitted for a president to remain in office have been flatly rejected.

A good number of Iranians have difficulty in believing that Rafsanjani will leave office for good, as Western presidents do. In general, they think his departure from active political life will open the doors wide for the radicals, thus dashing all their hopes of seeing their regime calming down and joining the international community. That is why some Iranians firmly believe that Ayatollah Khamene'i, who is reported to have cancer, may suddenly "go to paradise", the same way Ayatollah Khomeini's son, Ahmed, did more than a year ago.

This year witnessed the first Arab summit in six years. Twenty-one Arab nations participated, leaving Iraq out until "a more appropriate time". Observers and diplomats have agreed that bringing together the two Arab camps that grew out of the crisis caused by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a major step, yet, they say that much more is needed.

"Even though the immediate reasons for holding the summit were in the nature of an emergency, i.e. the advent of the right-wing Likud Party to power in Israel, preparations for the summit were going on full speed months before the actual announcement of the summit," said Mustafa El-Fiki, Egypt's ambassador to Vienna. According to El-Fiki, the summit represents the first step to overcome the lack of confidence which has characterised inter-Arab relations since the second Gulf war. "With this summit, Arabs have entered a new era of face-to-face relationship," he declared.

According to Mohamed Sobeh, Palestinian ambassador to the Arab League, "The development in pan-Arab relations was due to the danger facing the Arab world after the emergence of an extremist Israeli leadership that denies its obligations towards the peace process and does not hide its intentions towards expansion, settlements and Jerusalem." Sobeh also believes that the Cairo summit, along with the bilateral meetings held in various Arab capitals, prove that 1996 witnessed a remarkable progress in inter-Arab relations. "There is still some effort needed to hold a summit that will group all Arab countries, including Iraq, and that will settle disputes among Gulf countries," he added.

The importance of the Cairo summit, said Ahmed Hamrouh, head of the Egyptian Committee for Solidarity, is that it demonstrated the Arab approval of peace as a strategic option. He added that it "succeeded in hitting the rush in establishing and developing relations with Israel and showed the importance of having an Arab

vision for the future." Meanwhile, Ahmed Fakhr, head of the Nasser Institute for Strategic Studies, made the point that even though some may say that the middle of 1996 marks the end of Arab division, "one must not forget that there are still Arab differences at the bilateral level which require more Arab efforts to resolve."

Nabil Nejm, Iraqi ambassador to the Arab League, described the development in Pan-Arab

necessity entail political cooperation only. Economy as well can play a crucial role. "The remarkable success of the Cairo Economic Conference (MENA III) last November highlighted the distinguished role Arabs can play in regional cooperation. This will help the Arabs to establishing a more coherent economic system," said Fakhr.

Meanwhile, the complications in the peace

the Arabs only unite whenever challenged by Israel is worrisome because it makes the union dependent on external stimuli rather than intrinsic interests.

For other observers, the complications in the peace process which resulted from fragile agreements only worsened a rift that was already present among the Arab countries. Disagreements have emerged between the three Arab parties involved in the current peace process i.e. Syria, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Jordan.

One strategic expert who refused to be named said that the Arab-Israeli peace has become so intertwined with inter-Arab problems that it may block any attempt to institute full peace in the region. "The fragile peace that the Arabs believe they had reached became the target of external powers who want to re-draw the [region's] political map in the framework of Peres' New Middle East project or even the Euro-Mediterranean partnership," said the expert.

Analysts agree, however, that these new projects must not be regarded as a threat to pan-Arabism. They contend that such projects are rather organisational additions that cannot undermine the national dimension established by common Arab geographical and cultural factors.

El-Fiki further explained that there is a growing trend in political thought which holds that the age of nationalism is gone. Yet, the recent disappearance of some political entities and the emergence of new ones based mainly on the element of nationality proves the falseness of this concept. "If we just have a look at what happened in former Yugoslavia, the Soviet union and even Czechoslovakia, we will realise that new entities are built on national bases," said El Fiki. "These regional entities will be mainly based on the concept of co-existence and economic benefits but full peace is a precondition for any such grouping to survive," El-Fiki emphasised.

Arabs close ranks, slowly

Convening their first summit in five years, Arabs this year revealed a level of unity, unprecedented since the Gulf War. The scars of that war continue to make full Arab reconciliation a slow process. **Sherine Bahaa and Rasha Saad report**



photo: Reuters

relations as superficial and not genuine. He accused some Arab countries of giving much greater importance to their relations with the US than to those with the Arabs. He did, however, admit that "there is a slight development in Arab-Israeli relations," especially in the Egyptian-Israeli relationship. He said, "Our relations with Egypt have witnessed a remarkable development, given its membership in the UN Security Council and its effective role in bringing about the oil-for-food deal. On the economic level, Egypt also participated in Baghdad's economic fair. Reciprocal visits have also been coordinated among officials of both sides."

For Fakhr, Arab attempts at solidarity do not

process have caused problems in Arab relations because of diverging views on how these complications should be dealt with. For some observers, the election of Netanyahu and the faltering peace process highlight the importance of maintaining and expanding the concept of Pan-Arabism.

Hassan Nafa, a professor of political science at Cairo University, believes that plans to solve disputes peacefully among Arabs and to achieve economic integration in the region are the key for a real improvement in inter-Arab relations. According to him, a revival of the Arab League and the establishment of an Arab court of justice are also necessary. Nafa believes the fact that

Talking Turkey

Nobody thought it could happen but an Islamic-led coalition now rules Turkey. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reviews the main events in a turbulent year that witnessed the coming to power of the country's first Islamic premier

When former Prime Minister Tansu Ciller came to power in 1994, she was quoted as saying that she was "Turkey's only alternative to militant Islam." Two years later, her assertion was put to the test when general elections provided the Islamists with a substantial victory. The Refah (Welfare) Party, untainted by Turkey's old-style, corrupt patronage politics, captured 158 out of the 550 seats in Parliament and emerged from the general elections as the party with the largest support in the polls.

Political party leaders managed for three months to steer clear of the Welfare Party in post-election bargaining to forge a coalition. When the Ciller-Yilmaz coalition finally emerged earlier this year, it formed a government whose prime target was to keep the rising Islamic party from taking power. The partners, however, spent more time attacking each other than the opposition and ultimately it was the Islamists who benefited politically.

Three months later, the Welfare Party submitted a request to publicly question Ciller about a multi-million dollar secret slush fund that she allegedly managed while she was prime minister. These charges set the pundits pondering and engulfed the country's political future in uncertainty. Refah leader Necmettin Erbakan was then given the right, according to the constitution, to form a coalition government. He managed to hammer out a deal with Ciller by which a rotating premiership granted him the first two years in power as head of government.

When Erbakan assumed power as the country's first Islamic prime minister, one American expert on Turkish affairs warned that while the Turks should be left to decide their own future, special concessions that would redound to Mr Erbakan's political credit should be avoided. "Washington should be careful not to tip the scales in the Islamists' favour," warned Alan Makovsky, a senior fellow at the Institute for Near East Policy.

According to sources in Ankara, Erbakan is walking a tightrope between his party's Islamic line and his obligations to the military and secular elites of the state. His management of affairs during his six months in power has left much to be desired. The same sources revealed that the coalition government was the only formula for the Welfare Party to govern. One source told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "It has proved easier to contain the Islamists in a coalition government than to deal with them as a political opposition."

The same source added, "Erbakan is being forced to lose his power by not being permitted to fulfil his promises. For instance, he was completely against a military agreement with Israel; he was against the Poisoned Hammer (military facilities for Western powers to patrol northern Iraq skies) on the soil of Turkey; he promised that the veil would be allowed in universities; he promised army officials that they would not be thrown out from the military with the accusation of being fundamentalists and he promised an economic heaven. But as the first six months of his term are drawing to a close, none of this has happened." A military agreement with Israel is in effect and new ones are being hammered out. The

veil is not allowed in universities. The inflation rate is about 80 percent, as always. Sixty-nine army officials, 58 of them accused of fundamentalism, were kicked out from the army. This is the highest number ever.

Erbakan will try to sustain his coalition at any expense and will make the concessions necessary to remain in power, since he knows that this is his only chance to govern. Sources inside the Refah Party refuse to describe these changes as "political concessions" but rather "adopting the interests of the country." These same sources added that the party's policies did not undergo radical changes and that if the electoral promises are to be kept, national interests have to be considered above those of Islam. But Refah officials dismiss this as untrue. "This is the first time we are allowed to be part of the government. It takes time to act from a government's point of view and not as an opposition [party]," Abdullah Gul, the party's foreign affairs specialist told *the Weekly*.

On the Arab front, while Turkey became more involved in Middle Eastern politics after the second Gulf War, this year witnessed a deterioration in Arab-Turkish relations after Ankara signed a military pact with Israel in February. The agreement was sharply criticised by all Arab states, particularly Syria, which succeeded in rallying Arab support to collectively call upon Turkey to reconsider the accord. Relations grew tense when Western reports stated that the military agreement was the forerunner of a wide-ranging military pact that would include Turkey, Israel and Jordan.

In an interview with *the Weekly* last September, Turkish President Suleiman Demirel denied that the pact was part of an alliance in the making in the Middle East. "Any alliances in the region will undermine the peace process," the president told *the Weekly*. He also dismissed the notion that the pact was targeting a specific country, namely Syria. President Mubarak's two-day visit to the Turkish capital in July managed to put an end to much of the controversy surrounding the issue. Diplomatic sources in the Turkish Foreign Ministry point out that a similar pact has been signed by Turkey with most Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia.

On the European front, 1996 has been, in the words of many Turkish analysts, one of the worst years. Some went as far as warning the Turkish government about "a secret blockade in which the United States is taking part." According to former Foreign Minister Deniz Baykal, "a secret embargo is being imposed on Turkey." To illustrate his remarks, Baykal listed a number of signs: "The suspension of American military aid; the non-delivery of American military equipment already bought; the resolutions of the European Parliament; the new attitude of the European Council." The former minister accused the present government of irresponsibility, "Turkey is rapidly distancing itself from the Western world. It is on the way to being excluded from this system."

Turkey was dealt another blow in the European arena when the European Parliament decided by an overwhelming majority to freeze aid that should have gone to Turkey in 1997. The parlia-

ment based its decision on "Turkey's failure to respect its commitments regarding human rights." While Turkey accepts its role as a buffer zone at the eastern edge of the Western world, it wants full membership in the Western club in return for its good behaviour and is beginning to suspect that it will never get it.

Good tidings came to Turkey in the shape of the renewed sale of Iraqi oil and the consequent reopening of the oil pipelines between Turkey and Iraq. Under the limited resumption of Iraqi oil sales authorised by the United Nations, a pipeline running through Turkey is to handle half of Baghdad's exports of crude in exchange for a fee estimated at \$200 million annually. Turkish officials made the point that Turkey is also well placed to provide between 20 and 40 per cent of the \$1.3 billion in food and medicine that Iraq would be allowed to import every six months under a deal recently endorsed by the UN Security Council.

der a deal recently endorsed by the UN Security Council. On the domestic front, Erbakan is now obviously aware that there is no question of his keeping the promises he made during his election campaign. But Refah members should not believe that the emergence of their party as a major player on the Turkish political scene is the first step towards their reaching a dominant and unassailable position in Turkish politics.

"This coalition is so suited to be successful. First of all, there is a quite healthy division of tasks and power between the partners of coalition," commented one observer. And this coalition will continue to govern, says the observer, as long as Erbakan continues to make the concessions wanted by the army and the supporters of a secular Turkey. If he ceases to do this, the coalition will no longer be permitted to survive.



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Russia's last stroke

Before the end of the year, Yeltsin returns to the Kremlin and boasts that he is ready for battle, writes **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow

As Russian President Boris Yeltsin made his way back to his office just in time to inaugurate the Christmas break, he briefly stopped on the Kremlin steps, waved to the crowd of journalists and the occasional stroller and made his routine end-of-year statement. "The coming year," he said, "will certainly be better than the past year." By now thoroughly acquainted with Yeltsin's form of command optimism, most Russians dismissed his statement as yet another state end-of-year promise. Many political observers doubt that Yeltsin can breathe new life into his government's policies. In his five years in office, he has done little of the out-and-bolts work of running the government and has offered few ideas for solving the myriad problems plaguing Russia's economy.

Indeed, when looking back at 1996, the Russian people have no cause for celebration. For the Russians, the year was marked by a raging civil war in Chechnya, political instability, social upheaval, a sharp decrease in the gross domestic product and a huge accumulation of foreign debt. Going from bad to worse, things have not looked as dismal since World War II.

Besides the bleak economic conditions, 1996 also witnessed an upsurge in terrorism: bomb attacks, explosions, mafia-related homicide and crime in general were on the rise throughout the year. Russia's crime rate is currently the highest in the world. Moreover, the media disclosed that high-level government officials were deeply involved in political corruption, embezzlement attempts and juicy personal scandals.

The year was also plagued by widespread labour unrest. As in previous years, Yeltsin's ill-fated administration faced a serious nationwide payment crisis affecting millions of pensioners and workers, including coal miners, teachers, doctors and nuclear power engineers. Millions went on strike during the year, stopping production for weeks on end. Even the prestigious Russian army is affected, with officers and soldiers waiting for back payments.

Due to the bankruptcy of the Yeltsin regime, the Communists gained much ground over the past few months. This was heralded by the December '95 parliamentary elections, where the Communists made a remarkable comeback by capturing a third of the lower house of parliament's seats. And during the first round of the presidential elections in June, the Communist candidate, Gennady Zyuganov, seriously challenged Yeltsin's re-election bid when he gained 32 per cent of the vote — Yeltsin secured 35 per cent. Assessing Yeltsin's record and his capacity to run the country in 1997, Zyuganov emphatically denounced the Russian president's reforms. "Russia's economic crisis is a testament to the failure of Yeltsin's policies. [The crisis] has shown the complete hopelessness of the model of economic reforms offered by Russia's radical liberals," declared Zyuganov at a recent press conference.

The suspended civil war in Chechnya remains another area of contention and a potential political powder keg for Yeltsin. Although the Russian government and the Chechen separatists have decided to postpone a decision on the final status of the breakaway republic until the year 2000, Yeltsin's political advisers fear that the Chechen parliamentary and presidential elections, scheduled for 27 January 1997, may further destabilise the region by empowering the separatist factions. Despite the official end of hostilities and the ongoing negotiations, Chechnya is clearly experiencing deep turmoil because of the unresolved national question.

Indeed, the recurrent attacks on government installations, the bomb explosions and the attacks on Russians and foreign nationals attest to the region's political instability. The Chechen political leadership has even accused the Russian government of instigating terrorism in an attempt to have the upcoming elections either delayed or annulled. Chechnya's security chief, Abu Movsayev, has accused the Russian secret service of organising the recent killings of six Red Cross workers and six Russian nationals. Although the Russian Interior Ministry and Federal Security Service have denied involvement in the slayings and dismissed such accusations as "irresponsible", Yeltsin's government has a strong political stake in sabotaging elections which may eventually pave the way to Chechnya's independence.

Since Chechnya's bid for independence after the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Yeltsin has feared that Chechnya's secession may have a domino effect in the region and ultimately trigger a wider regional independence drive in the Caucasus, fragmenting the Russian Federation. This fear was recently expressed by Russian parliamentarians during a closed session. Some deputies warned that allowing elections to take place would empower the Chechen executive to establish economic and trade relations with foreign governments, thus sooner or later paving the way for eventual independence — which should be avoided at all costs. Viewed in this context, given the high stakes at issue, it is becoming increasingly clear that despite the current cease-fire and ongoing negotiations, Yeltsin's ill-fated invasion of Chechnya, during which an estimated 100,000 Chechens were killed and more than 200,000 injured, is far from being resolved.

On the home front, Yeltsin's ordeal with a quaking heart bypass operation and his consequent forced retreat from the political scene resulted in major power battles between his former national security adviser, General Alexander Lebed — Yeltsin's special envoy to Chechnya and a supporter of its independence — and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, who opposes the republic's self-determination. Chernomyrdin came out ahead when the president finally fired the all-too feisty and strong-minded Lebed, a potential powerful successor to Yeltsin.

Upon his return to the Kremlin, Yeltsin announced that he would put his house back in order, lending credence to the rumour that heads of men like Chernomyrdin and Chief-of-Staff Anatoly Chubais will roll now that Yeltsin has made his come-back. Some analysts, however, believe that the president needs political scapegoats to offer for the untenable situation and to prove that he has regained control. Notwithstanding Yeltsin's vigorous announcements, the Russian people seem unimpressed. After five years of economic upheaval caused by market reforms, most ordinary Russians are more concerned with deep-rooted economic problems than with passing Kremlin intrigues.

Thousands of refugees stranded in the mountains above Nungu camp in eastern Zaire streamed down into the vicinity of Sake village, 27 November. The refugees awaited transfer to the Zairean-Rwandan border. Most of the ethnic Hutu refugees terrorised by their fellow Hutu leaders were until recently fearful of returning to Rwanda. In 1996, the refugees decided to return home in spite of being attacked by the militias of the Hutu leadership and the Zairean army. Most of the refugees had returned home by mid-December (photo: Reuters)



The struggle continues

There is hope yet for Africa, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**, as he charts a rough guide to the continent's woes and joys in '96

Let us follow the African economic recovery trail. Its twists and turns are legion. Tribal passions are stirred up by exhausted soils. Ethnic conflict is a euphemism for several other far more serious problems. Take Burundi. Passions constitute 90 per cent of the country's nine million people. Demographic pressures accentuate the problem of increasing food production in what is, apart from Rwanda, the most densely populated country on the continent.

Food production in Burundi is actually on the rise. But agricultural development based on traditional lines has become untenable. Ethnic Hutu peasants have encroached on the marshlands of ethnic Tutsi pastoralists. Draining marshlands compounded soil erosion problems. Overfarming and the intense use of previously marginal agricultural land inflamed ethnic hatred. Over the past decade, some 50,000 hectares of equatorial jungle have been cleared with dire consequences for Burundi's ecosystem. Ecological disasters are at the root of ethnic conflict in Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire. Ethnic conflict is the result, not the cause, of Africa's economic malaise and social upheaval.

In Zaire, too, economic disparities and ecological considerations fuel ethnic and regional tensions. A line running between Kananga in southwestern Zaire and Kisangani in the northeast of the country divides the country linguistically, ethnically and economically. Acidity, aluminium toxicity and phosphorus saturation in the soil have rendered intensive farming impossible in many areas of the vast country. Pollutants are washed down toward the Congo-Zaire and Nile basins. Displaced and disoriented, people have resorted to arms to achieve their goals. For these people, the way forward is armed struggle for survival.

Laurent-Désiré Kabila, leader of the Alliance for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, is the most famous of those who have resorted to arms. Kabila is now in control of much of eastern Zaire. Kabila controls the capitals of northern and southern Zaire — Bukavu and Kinshasa. His armed opposition leader, Jacques Matanga Ma Mboya, who is today in exile in neighbouring Angola, is another Zairean figure who has resorted to arms. Mboya has made frequent visits to a fellow guerrilla leader from Lower Zaire province, who goes by the name of Major Pico and is now based in Uganda. President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda is a staunch supporter of both Major Pico and Kabila. The latter is also backed by Rwanda, Burundi and other East African states. Angola and several other southern African nations support Mboya. The central thrust of the ideology of Kabila, Mboya and Pico is that they reject Zaire's sham democracy; they have opted for the armed struggle. Uganda's Museveni followed the

same path, as did the now ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front in Rwanda.

Eastern Zaire is Swahili-speaking and the ethnic groups there have close ties to the people of Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania and other East African countries. Eastern Zaire is also resource-rich and far more economically viable than western Zaire. The provinces of eastern Zaire are Kasai, Kivu, Shaba and Upper Zaire. Kivu, bordering Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania, is Zaire's granary and has vast reserves of natural gas and oil. Kasai produces most of Zaire's major export earner, diamonds. Shaba, formerly Katanga, which tried to secede from Zaire in 1960, is rich in copper, cobalt, manganese and uranium. Upper Zaire has untapped gold, diamond and oil reserves.

The western Zairean provinces — Lower Zaire, Equateur, Bandundu and Kinshasa, the capital — are poorer in mineral and agricultural resources. Moreover, the ethnic groups in western Zaire speak Lingala as a lingua franca. President Mobutu Sese Seko is from the west; most Zairean opposition leaders are from the east, centre or south of the country. But let us not muddle ethnic conflict and regionalism with the closely related phenomena of social disintegration, ecological disasters and intractable economic problems. What is changing — what the drums of war warn us of — is that quickly executed coups d'état in the capital are out and long drawn-out armed struggles in rural areas are in.

Mobutu seized power on 24 November 1965. His People's Movement of the Revolution (MPR) was for over two decades the sole political party in Zaire. Mobutu bowed to French, Belgian and American pressure and legitimised numerous political parties — there are over 45 legal political parties in Zaire today. Zaire has some 200,000 ethnic groups speaking some 500 different languages. The great unanswered question is what will happen to Zaire in the post-Mobutu era. The president is a very sick man. He returned this week to Zaire after undergoing cancer surgery in Switzerland. He received a tumultuous welcome.

The MPR is still a power to be reckoned with, but whether the MPR will remain held together after Mobutu's demise is another question. The opposition to Mobutu in Kinshasa has centred around Biemba Tshisekedi. He is from Kasai Province in central Zaire and hails from the same ethnic group — the Luba — as Kabila's chief-of-staff, André Kissase Ngandu. The point is that two leaders of the same ethnic group chose different paths to power — Tshisekedi through party political activism in the capital and Ngandu through the barrel of the gun in the Zairean jungle.

Are ethnic conflicts Africa's quagmire? Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order*, published earlier this year, claimed that "cultural identities are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration and conflict in the post-Cold War period." Frankly, I think that Huntington's provocative assertion that "global politics is being reconfigured along cultural lines" is gobbledegook.

The West has decided that the armed struggle phase is gaining momentum. It is devising ways and means to deal with it. It is no surprise then that the new United Nations secretary-general is a sub-Saharan African. He also happens to be a man with vast experience in peacekeeping. Kofi Annan, let us not forget, headed until very recently the UN peacekeeping operations. Rapid-reaction or deployment forces and international peacekeeping brigades are at the top of his agenda. Madeleine Albright, the United States secretary of state designee, appreciates Annan's virtues. The West has decided to focus on rapid deployment forces to quell armed rebellions in Africa and many African leaders, in power and in opposition, have been more than willing to play a supportive role.

The glee with which the media reports the calamities in Africa is sickening. The ghosts of pre-colonial tribal wars were exhumed in modern armed rebellions across Africa in 1996 — or so the international media would have us believe. They say that in 1996 Africa's imminent integration into the global economy was delayed by a last-minute hitch: ethnic conflict. I do not believe ethnic conflict is an insurmountable problem.

For Africa, 1996 was both exciting and exasperating. Today, Africa is immovably ensconced as runner-up to Asia in the rapid economic growth rates league and tipped to become the fastest growing region in the first decade of the 21st century. Why the optimism? What has changed? The international financial institutions are pleased with Africa's performance. Their message was loud and clear: do it right, or not at all. Right, of course, refers to privatisation, deregulation and the application of stringent monetarist policies.

America is, nevertheless, all-important in Africa. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have their headquarters in Washington DC. Africa watches how South Africa's National Economic Development and Labour Council, perhaps the single most important organisation of its kind on the continent, is dealing with the IMF. South Africa asked the IMF for assistance in increasing its foreign reserves to protect the country's currency, the rand. Michel Camdessus, the IMF's director-general, visited South Africa this year and

met South African President Nelson Mandela. "We have to ensure that our monetary policy complies with guidelines the IMF have set," Mandela said last week. "Without infringing on our sovereignty, these guidelines are absolutely necessary." Most other African leaders share his opinion.

Some would have us believe that left to its own devices, Africa — its economy and ecosystems — is unsuitable for the next century. But Africa is among the best-equipped continents to take advantage of the global economy. Africa cannot claim that many high-tech start-ups, but it didn't, I believe, get the praise it deserved in 1996 for turning its economy around. Why are we not told that the number of African countries with negative growth rates dropped from 19 in 1993 to three in 1996? Good news is no news. Key fast-expanding African economies like Ghana, Uganda and South Africa all had economic growth rates of over six per cent in 1996. Not only do prospects for an upturn in Africa's economy look promising, but the political map of Africa is changing for the better, too.

Still, all three high-flyers have crippling social woes. The continent's grave socio-economic predicaments are compounded by its debt crisis. African debt has now climbed to close to \$315 billion, which is double its 1980s level. It is equivalent to over 95 per cent of the continent's gross domestic product (GDP). For sub-Saharan Africa the debt burden is even heavier still — 123 per cent of GDP. The comparable figure for North Africa is 73 per cent. The sub-Saharan figure compares unfavourably with less than 50 per cent for Latin America. Sub-Saharan African debt today totals some \$223.2 billion and is now almost 270 per cent of the region's export earnings. Africa used 31 per cent of its export earnings to service its debts in 1991 and the figure was the same in 1996. Africa's arrears on debt-service payments doubled from \$32.6 billion to \$62.2 billion between 1991 and 1994. One-fifth of the continent's savings goes on servicing debts.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) to Africa accounts for only two per cent of the total FDI to developing countries. However, the decline in Africa's share of total FDI inflows to the South was halted in 1996: it was 10 per cent in 1987-91, five per cent in 1992-94, 3.6 per cent in 1995 and is projected to stand at five per cent in 1996.

It was Washington which nudged Burundi's military ruler Pierre Buyoya back into office on 25 July. Why Washington has aligned itself with Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi against its old henchman Mobutu remains a mystery. But events in the Great Lakes region will unfold in 1997, uncovering America's agenda for Africa.

Liberalisation takes all

1996 secured the victory of world economic liberalisation. It was not a good year for the Third World's poor, writes **Faiza Rady**

"In the developing countries, an estimated 13-18 million people, mostly children, die from hunger and poverty each year. That is about 400 people a day, or 1,700 people an hour."

James Speth, president of the World Resource Institute

The most remarkable thing about 1996 may just be how predictable it was, and how the pattern of economic and political upheavals inevitably followed the single-minded logic of global market reforms. In this context, it would be tempting to label 1996 as the year of "globalisation". In fact, the year ended with a victory for globalisation and the "free market" with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial conference, held in Singapore. The conference assured more of the same for the next few decades, in an attempt by powerful Northern nations to institutionalise market reforms way into the 21st century — thereby mortgaging the world's future to neo-liberalism. This was confirmed by WTO head Renato Ruggiero, who declared in Singapore that reforms and trade liberalisation have now "reached the point of no return".

Although reforms date back to the early 1980s and the era of US President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the full-blown global impact of liberalising trade by lifting protective tariffs, privatising state enterprises and rolling back health, welfare and social security benefits strongly reverberated into the 1990s. While this was equally true in the North and the South, people in the South were the most affected. "Especially ravaged were the regions that were most severely subjected to reforms: Latin America and Africa. In Latin America, the force of reforms struck with special fury, largely cancelling out the progress of the 1960s and 1970s. The numbers of people living in poverty rose from 130 million in 1980, to 180 million at the beginning of the 1990s," wrote sociologist Walden Bello. Class inequalities in the region are aggravated by a 20-fold income differential between the richest and the poorest 20 per cent.

In sub-Saharan Africa the picture is even worse. UNICEF reports that the subcontinent has the highest under-five mortality rates worldwide. Niger tops the list with 320 deaths per 1,000 births. (Finland, the country with the lowest infant mortality rate, has five deaths per 1,000 births.) Life expectancy in the region continues to be the shortest in the world with the average life-span estimated at 51 years. According to the 1992 World Bank debt report, the total debt for the subcontinent amounts to 110 per cent of its gross national product, compared to the figure of 35 per cent of aggregate GNP for all developing countries. By the early 1990s real per capita income declined to its 1960s levels. And the sit-

uation is getting worse.

The United Nations Development Programme estimates that the subcontinent's current 30 per cent share of the world's poor will rise to 40 per cent by the year 2000. Worldwide in 1996, social upheavals revealed people lashing out at the gradual erosion of their social base and the loss of their livelihoods.

In wealthy South Africa — one of the world's leading producers of diamonds, gold, magnesium and uranium — the black majority is still massively underdeveloped. In a country of 37.7 million, they represent 95 per cent of the 18 million people living below the poverty line. Sixty per cent of blacks survive in conditions of absolute poverty. "The African National Congress will soon square face [apartheid's] legacy of vast social dysfunction, grotesque under-education and armed anger," predicted political analyst Martin Woolcott.

In Mexico, as a result of the wholesale auctioning of the public sector, 10 financial monopolies emerged which control 71 per cent of the stock market shares. "By selling the nation's patrimony to a handful of wealthy families, the government has created a dangerous rupture of the social fabric," commented Jaime Aviles, editor-in-chief of the Mexican daily *La Jornada*. Among the 37 million employable people, 21.5 million are either unemployed or underemployed and half of the workforce makes less than the minimum wage. And as a direct result of the December 1994 stock market crash, 800,000 people lost their jobs.

The dire material conditions resulted in a resurgence of militant insurgency in Mexico. In late June a new rebel group — the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) — surfaced in Guerrero, a poverty-stricken southern state where farmers still live in mud shacks without water or electricity, while the rich and the super-rich vacation in neighbouring Acapulco's ritzy clubs and casinos. Co-ordinating their attacks on government installations in six states, the EPR killed at least 20 policemen and marines. Senator Heriberto Castillo said the group emerged as a result of social marginalisation, poverty and political repression. "The people do not want to take up arms," said the senator, "but they are forced to."

In Russia, '96 appeared as gloomy as '95, despite the much heralded drop of annual inflation from 200 to 52 per cent. The decreased inflation rate, however, was meaningless to the millions who went without salaries for months on end, receiving food coupons in lieu of pay cheques. Accordingly, labour protests intensified. In February, 450,000 coal miners went on strike, shutting down an estimated 80 per cent of the industry's production. Over the same period, some 250,000 teachers also stayed away from work. Expressing the workers' col-

lective despair during President Boris Yeltsin's re-election campaign, an enraged coal miner fumed: "This is not wartime for God's sake; it is the reform for north. We risk our lives digging for coal and they pay us with bits of paper."

Since Russia started its head-over-heels privatisation drive, production has decreased by 50 per cent and lay-offs are rampant. Unemployment is estimated at 10 per cent, affecting millions of workers, and the drop in production was reflected in this year's slow growth rate in gross domestic product — estimated at one per cent. As a consequence of untenable working conditions and endemic wage delays, the Communists scored a major victory by capturing 22 per cent of the vote in last December's parliamentary elections. Boris Yeltsin only barely managed to defeat the Communist candidate, Gennady Zyuganov, in this year's presidential elections by allying himself with General Alexander Lebed in the second round.

In reference to the increasing class polarisation in the embattled country, sociologist Alain Bihl commented: "Compounded and reproduced, social inequalities form a system, trapping an increasing number of people, who insidiously lose their rights and their citizen's status."

From the perspective of 1996, it looks like neo-liberalism has won the day. Since the early 1980s, the World Bank and its sister organisation, the International Monetary Fund, have imposed structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), or reforms, as loan preconditions on countries of the North and the South. Claiming to redress macro-economic imbalances like deficits in the budget, the balance of payments and trade as well as inflationary trends, the international funding institutions (IFIs) have advocated public sector privatisation, exchange rate liberalisation, currency devaluation and the removal of tariff and trade barriers. Notwithstanding the failure of SAPs in many parts of the world, the IFIs tenaciously continue to promote market reforms as the only form of "sustainable" development, branding the Asian success stories as models.

Yet many analysts suggest that Asian countries only partially applied SAPs, if at all. Refusing the funding agencies' directives to remove trade and tariff barriers, Asian countries kept a tight protectionist lid over local capital and industrial growth. They also regulated the inflow of foreign investment and used it to strengthen their national manufacturing base. Some countries like Taiwan and Malaysia avoided implementing SAPs altogether. Other countries like South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia only selectively implemented reform requirements.

South Korea, for example, retained its tariff system and thereby protected the growth of its local in-

dustrial products, which continued to be absorbed by domestic market demands. In addition, imports and foreign investments were subjected to strict regulations — which guaranteed local capital and commodities a competitive edge. Thailand established a policy of manufacturing import-substitution commodities in the late '80s, after which growth rates started to soar. On the other hand, it may be telling that the most "reformed" country in the region, the Philippines, remains to this day the poorest and least developed.

Promoting the Asian model as a SAP success story, the IFIs continue to advocate reforms, with the contention that their overall strategy will lead to economic growth and ultimately develop the South by attracting much needed foreign investments. This, the IFIs claim, is particularly needed in Africa — the poorest continent with 32 of the world's 48 least developed countries.

However, despite a long and painful history of SAPs in Africa, the actual flow of foreign investment to the continent has, so far, remained minimal. Currently, investment flows to Africa amount to only five per cent of total investment to the rest of the developing world. More importantly, such investment has been concentrated mainly in the extraction sector and has been restricted to a few countries — such as oil-rich Nigeria and mineral-rich Botswana, a leading exporter of diamonds to South Africa. Even in these countries, foreign investment in the manufacturing and service sectors has remained minimal, accounting for only seven per cent of total foreign investment. Other countries have been relatively successful because of their peculiar geographical position, like Lesotho and Swaziland, which have become interesting to investors because of their potential as convenient export bases to southern Africa.

At the end of the day, it is becoming increasingly evident that despite almost two decades of rigorous deregulation, foreign investment has only moved to a few select sectors of African economies, which ensure Northern-based transnationals quick and easy profits. Beyond serving as transit export areas or providers of cheap raw materials, African economies have not developed significantly as a result of foreign investment since transnationals have routinely failed to invest in the national manufacturing and service sectors. Moreover, profits generated from foreign investment have generally been repatriated, leaving little room for the development of local industries, increased employment and better living conditions.

In the words of economist Susan George, "The point of economic deregulation is not to provide decent jobs at decent wages but to make as large a profit as possible. End of story."

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الموزعون المعتمدون		
شركة الاتصالات - القاهرة تليفون : ٢٢٧٧٧٧ / ٢٢٧٨١٧ تليفون : ٢٢٧١٠٤٤	ليسينسكوم فرم - الاسكندرية تليفون : ٥٤٦٦٠٢٢ (٠٣) الاسكندرية ٣٦٠٧٢١٥ / ٣٦١٣٩١٥	شركة ICS تليفون : ٢٢٧١٠٩٢
مراكز التوزيع		
شركة الروضة - تليفون : ٢٧٠٩٠٦٦ مجموعة عماد السويدي للكهرباء تليفون : ٢٦١١٧٣٢	شركة لوتس توريد تليفون : ٢٤٦٩٤٥٥ الرايد للاستيراد والتصدير تليفون : ٢٤٨٧٢٤٤	مركز النيل للسيارات - القاهرة تليفون : ٢٧٥٠٥٣٢ شركة مافرا - تليفون : ٢٢٧١٠٩٢
مناقص البيع		
شركة الاهرام للتجارة تليفون : ٢٢٧١٥٥٦ (٠٢) مجموعة ج. ا. ا. ا. ٢٢٨٥٨٢ / ٢٢٨٥٨١ جورين باور - تليفون : ٢٢٧١١٥٩ معرض لشر - تليفون : ٢٢٦٥٠٦١ مكتبة خضير - تليفون : ٢٢٦٥٠٦١	بول اند فاير - تليفون : ٥٠٦٠٠٠٠ سويت هوم - تليفون : ٢٤٥١٧٣٠ معرض جاجوار - تليفون : ٤٠١٧٣٣٩ معرض سيمنس للأجهزة المنزلية تليفون : ٢٤٤٦٣٢٥ / ٢٤٤٦٣٢٥	جودة جروب - تليفون : ٢٤٤٦٣٢٥ تليفون : ٤١٧٠٠١١ معرض يوش - تليفون : ٤١٧٥٨٥٥ القاهرة للمبيعات - تليفون : ٤١٧٠٣٨٤ معرض ميرا - تليفون : ٣٠٣٦٣٩٠ م/مازم سليمان - تليفون : ٣٦١٧٥٤٥ شركة القطيم - تليفون : ٣٦١٧٥٤٥ رايدر طلعت - تليفون : ٣٦١٧٥٤٥
محللات		
فرع مركز التجارة العالمية تليفون : ٢٢٠٤٧٨٨ فرع الزمالك - تليفون : ٢٢٠٤٧٨٨	تليفون : ٢٢٦١٣٩٠ تليفون : ٢٢٦١٣٩٠ تليفون : ٤٥٢٣٣٩٠	فرع محمد محمود (طلعت حرب) ٥٧٥٦٠٠٠ / ٥٧٥٦١٥٥ تليفون : ٤١٧٣٣٩٠

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Checking out of Hotel Zion

Mobile migrants and part-time patriots; for Israelis, the wake-up call is harsh. Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri finds the bitter dregs of Zionist reality at the bottom of the mythical cup



settlers and American agents. The poem opens with a vote being taken in the Knesset over the final departure and then, "Let's be off to America now / We've packed our bags and our hopes". Everybody makes a rush to the door ("Don't shove... there's place for everyone / Please folks, don't push like that"). The prime minister watches this panicked exit from the helicopter: "He decides to pull rank / and announces there's no room for the rest." His motto and that of his ministers is evidently *Après nous le déluge!* The image is precisely the opposite of the Samson or Massada, for the hero here refuses to remain, and to die alongside his companions:

"Hastily, the plane takes off,
As for the state,
It has been abandoned,
Left behind, alone, Israel."

After a few trite exhortations in protest ("Can we not try again? / Are we not faithful citizens?"), the people on the ground discover that the helicopter has taken off with their ministers and their dreams:

"If we are really like that,
and our government packed its bags to the USA,
Then all of us will do the same
and make our way there, happily."

Far away from the ruins of Massada, Zion consumed in flames, off to the US, the safer homeland — and, perhaps, the real one after all. The bitterness and melancholy so prevalent in Israeli jokes and poetry is even clearer in Israeli songs, which are filled with a sense of nihilism, loss, destruction and isolation. In the wake of the 1967 War, Uri Avnery noted that the most popular song in Israel was one that rejoiced in the refrain, "The whole world is against us." The gloom here lies in the feeling of distinction of difference, where self-hate and pride mingle.

The sense of loss increased in the wake of the 1973 War. It is epitomised by the singer Arbel Zeller who formed a rock group called Tamuz. The band relies heavily on the imagery of the runaway juvenile. Zeller, who lost a leg while playing with a hand-grenade when he was a child, shot to fame with *Holikh Beni* (To No Avail), which depicts a young delinquent on the search for drugs, sex and spare parts from stolen cars.

Old Testament heroes and prophets, the fundamental symbols of Zionist nationalism, are also ridiculed. One song refers to David and Goliath: "And the five books of Moses come out to cheer / If you want to become our king / when in your sixth year / then make us a battle ring." Another Zeller song features Samson as "a garbage truck driver" and a play written during the same period presents David as a homosexual.

Most of the singers who mock the Zionist myth are the product of the Kibbutz and gained prominence after 1972 as the Zionists began to grow aware of their crisis. Ma'ir Pamey's is one of the most famous songs of the '80s, a beautiful and melancholy melody that poignantly expresses the settlers' sense of the crumbling legitimacy of Zionism:

"They're all going somewhere
Looking for the sweet future
But me, I wake up in the morning
and take bus number 5 to the beach
The bus is full of smoke
and two old women
and the conductor
there's writing on a cement wall:
"What happened to the state?"
I look at the state and I see the cement
the birds sing, "good morning."
Maybe I can fly away with them,
and not fall."

The vacant bus is an eloquent symbol for the crisis of Zionist settlement. It has only a single old woman in it (perhaps the symbol of the aging, infertile "Jewish people?"). The name of the state on the cement wall speaks of stagnation and death, while outside the empty bus, the birds appear to offer some hope of a new beginning. But even as the singer longs to fly away, to escape the desolation, the likelihood of falling is always present. There is no way forward and no way back.

The sense of despair at the failure and hopelessness of the Zionist enterprise has found its way into numerous jokes and songs, sarcastic or melancholy, all of which attempt to portray a very complex, inescapable historical predicament. The Zionist experience has demonstrated that, although the Zionists are able to inflict some harm on the Arabs, they will not be able to normalise their situation and reach the happy ending, i.e. when the Arabs disperse and the Palestinians disappear.

Little wonder that the word "Zionism" itself, representing a set of ideas that steered the settlers to the very dilemma in which they find themselves, has lost much of its splendour and romance. Indeed, it lost its significance altogether. A sign without meaning, a word without substance. An Israeli writer observed that the difference in Hebrew between Zionism (*zionism*) and indifference (*kein*) is the letter 'z', or zero. In "Immortal Zionism" the writer has the pessimist point out that the words "Zionism" and "Zionism" appear on the same page in the English dictionary, which is indicative of their similarity in meaning. The pessimist was not so far from the truth. The word "Zionism" has come to mean "a pompous drive" (*Jerusalem Post*, 26 April 1984). Hard and excessive patriotic chauvinism, as well as a severe case of political naïveté (*The Economist*, 21 July 1984 and *The Tragedy of Zionism*, Bernard Avishai, p. 26).

Clearly, the word's connotations allude to two sets of people: the diaspora Zionists who fly in to Hotel Zion to hear the preaching that has no bearing on reality. These are the naive and zealous patriots who pay lip-service to Zionist clichés. But the word also refers to the Zionists inside Israel who are aware that the speeches they have to give ring hollow, but speak them nevertheless in order to "normalise their generous guests." "Give him Zionism" means to lay on the high-flown rhetoric that has no meaning. The fate of the term "Zionism" is probably an indication of the fate of Zionism, and Zionist settlements; they have become an anachronism, a veritable burden, to both Arabs and Israelis, to both Jews and gentiles.

'Hotel Zion is how one Israeli intellectual summed up the relationship of international Jewry with Israel. They flock to it in the winter and summer when the weather is pleasant, but as soon as it starts turning cold, they head off, leaving the hotel staff (the Israeli settlers) to lock up the doors and windows and make the necessary repairs and renovations so that they can welcome the tourists back the following season.'



ended. But now we know the truth. The Americans are dying to come to Israel."

One of the most poignant jokes is that related by an Israeli settler on the occasion of the 40th anniversary celebrations of the creation of the state of Israel. He said: "The whole Zionist enterprise is based on a silly misunderstanding. It was supposed to be in Canada, not Palestine. But Moses committed a slip of the tongue. When God asked him what country he wanted, he meant to say Canada, but he stammered, 'Ca-Ca, Ca-Na, Na-Na.' So the Lord gave him the land of Canaan (i.e. Palestine). The children of Israel were furious. They said, 'You could have gotten Canada instead of that godforsaken, desolate place, that Middle Eastern blight filled with sand and Arabs.'

This black humour reflects a deep sense of the fundamental historical impasse of Zionism, which has given rise to complete nihilism. The same sense is revealed in a short lyric written by a Zionist settler on a bathroom wall in the Hebrew University:

"Go back to Spain, Sephardim
Back to Europe, Ashkenazim
Let the Arabs go back to the desert.
And we'll give back this land to our Maker
Who has caused us problems aplenty
when he promised it to all and sundry."

This sardonic poem is aimed directly at the presumed divine promise upon which Zionist discourse is founded. The awareness of being in a permanent state of war expresses itself in a sense of the absurd. In "Prayer to the Wounded of War", the Israeli poet Shalev addresses the Lord:

"Oh Lord of the wounded encased in plaster,
Oh Lord of the injured fastened to oxygen masks
Oh Lord of the souls above whose beds
crimson blood bags are suspended."

As is commonly known, it is the Zionist perception that God has a special relationship with the Jewish people (or, as Ben Gurion said, if God chose this people, this people chose God). Consequently, one finds that everything that is sacred for the Jews assumes a national flavour (and all "national" phenomena, such as the creation of the state of Israel, are enveloped in an aura of sanctity in the Zionist consciousness). In the poem above, the author attempts to awaken the Israelis to the fact that there is no such special relationship, that they are not God's chosen people, and that they are no different from all other human beings who, when wounded in war, need blood transfusions. Hence the references to medical equipment, and the poem's conclusion in parody of a traditional prayer:

"Lord of the souls of those living,
between sedatives and tranquilisers,
Reveal to them what only you can reveal."

This bitterness, sense of futility and loss of a sense of direction also manifests itself in a story by Ran Adiel called "Swan Song". In one scene, two Israeli soldiers sitting in a trench have the following conversation:

"Is a bomb going to fall?"
"I heard that the other location on the supply route is real suicide."

"What then? Are we going to stay here forever?"
"Are you crazy?"
"Should we pull out?"
"Have you gone mad?"
"A new war then?"
"Is the situation that hopeless?"
"Do you know what you want?"

"I heard that the other location on the supply route is real suicide."

"What then? Are we going to stay here forever?"
"Are you crazy?"
"Should we pull out?"
"Have you gone mad?"
"A new war then?"
"Is the situation that hopeless?"
"Do you know what you want?"

"No, do you?"
"No."
"What a pity... let's go find the other location."
Boom!

The soldiers' predicament epitomises the situation of Israeli society as a whole. The sense of entrapment in a vicious circle that leads the Israelis from one war to another is expressed in Jacob Nassar's poem, "The Coming War":

"The coming war,
we raise it, we nurture it
in our bedrooms,
and in the children's bedrooms.
As sleep
grows wreathed in black
I cringe from its touch in horror."

The poet suggests that since war is inevitable, all energies of Israeli society are funneled into cultivating the cast-iron flowers of the coming war, "in our bedrooms, and in the children's bedrooms."

The poem also alludes to another theme in Israeli literature: the fear of bearing children. The Zionist government has always pushed child-bearing to an obsessive degree, not out of any love for motherhood and children, but as a means to secure the foundations of the settler colonialist entity. Ironically, however, Jewish Israelis have one of the lowest birth rates in the world.

On one occasion, the government considered declaring a year of child-bearing. The reaction, as might be expected, was prompt, incisive and sarcastic. One Knesset member suggested that the Israeli Prime Minister should stay home with his wife and perform his national duty — for a national duty it is. As geography professor Arnon Saffir put it: "Sovereignty over the land of Israel will not be settled by guns and hand-grenades, but rather in two domains: the bedroom and the universities — and it will not be long before the Palestinians surpass us in both."

Indeed, this is the obsession with the higher Palestinian birthrates that Israelis speak of the prolific Palestinian women as "Africa's biological bomb." There are many reasons for the Israelis' low birth rates (the concentration of the inhabitants in urban centres, the secularism of Israeli society and a pervasive pleasure orientation). One cannot deny, however, that the inability to bear children reflects the Israelis' anxiety regarding their anomalous situation, as an entity forcibly implanted in the region.

"The Dreamer" by Basma Amit relates the story of a young woman, plagued by fears and nightmares of bombs and war. When her mother asks, "Why don't you give me a grandson, my dear?" the daughter remains mute (silence appears to be the only response available to many protagonists in Israeli literature).

The fear of child-bearing is also the theme of "El-Alamein" by Yagub Shafir. This amusing story is about a young Israeli woman who wants to get an abortion, but whose aunt, between various promises and threats, manages to dissuade her.

The story is narrated by the child who is eventually born. He begins: "In October '42, my aunt saved my life." It was in that month, he tells us, that the battle of El-Alamein was being waged (the story is interspersed with flashes of battle scenes, rumbling tanks and black smoke). Against this bleak background of international conflict, the mother feels weak and helpless. What is the point of having children if they are going to grow up in the midst of war, and eventually die of hunger? she asks. Her aunt tells her that she must have children, for the sake of humanity. "Then let humanity have children," the niece responds petulantly. The aunt, with

a rather narrow vision of the world, "always has a moral to tell," "is strong-headed and determined" and "only speaks to give orders." She assails the young mother "like a beast of prey attacking a chicken."

The Zionist position is bleak; Israelis must be resigned to a permanent state of war. These themes are reflected in the speech delivered by Moshe Dyan at the funeral of his friend, Roy Rothberg, who was killed by Palestinian *fedayin*. The former Israeli defence minister said: "We are a generation of settlers. We cannot plant a tree or build a house without a helmet or a gun. We have to close our eyes to the ravine burning in the hearts of thousands of Arabs around us. We cannot afford to turn our heads or else our hands will tremble. It is the fate of our generation, the choice of our generation, to be ready and armed, to be strong and hard, so that the sword does not slip from our hands and we lose our life."

A few years ago, the Israeli poet Haim Guri remarked: "The thirst of this earth (the land of Israel) is never quenched." It constantly requires "more graves and more coffins." It is as though the land of Israel were a grotesque, vengeful goddess rather than a mere stretch of territory. As Israeli writer Ben Elzer observed, the young Israelis who serve in the army feel that their families, with the complicity of the government, are sacrificing them with no hope for compensation and no consolation through the belief in life after death. These wars, they feel, are the ritual for the "secular sacrifice of Isaac" — pointless human waste with no hope for redemption.

National myths have emerged that translate this situation into a tight ideological edifice. The myths of Massada and Samson both represent the Jews resisting a final stage of siege. No escape is possible except through the destruction of both the Self and the Other, the annihilation of both the besieged and the besieger. No happy ending here; rather, total annihilation.

Nevertheless, in spite of these references to siege and destruction, the Israeli consciousness transcends these apt Zionist myths. Yehoshafat Harkabi suggests that the Israelis glorify illusion and fail to realise that reality lies within the more realistic bounds of the feasible. He illustrates his point with the story of Bar Kochba, who allied himself with a group of rabbis. The rabbis declared him the Messiah and together they decided to confront the forces of the Roman Empire. The Bar Kochba rebellion against the Romans (132-135 BC) was fought against all military odds; no attempt was made to assess the strong and weak points of the Roman forces. The result was the annihilation of the rebels, the quashing of the rebellion and the termination of the last remnants of Jewish presence in Palestine. In this case, the Samson-like suicide drive did not involve the destruction of the enemy, only of the self. Harkabi called this tendency the "Bar Kochba syndrome", a pathological suicidal impulse that claims its victim, rather than a Massada that claims everyone.

The same inclination to revise the Massada legend can be found in the poem by Haim Hefar written during the Intifada. In the depiction of the final siege, instead of mass suicide, we find an American helicopter landing on the American embassy at the last minute (reminiscent of the final "boys in Vietnam" ready to evacuate the last Israeli

Year of the yawn

Eqbal Ahmad looks back at '96 and finds a heartless and disheartened world in which no one stood out, no one imagined a better future and none truly spoke for the disinherited, and none served justice in places which begged for it

The year opened drowsily and ended in a drawn-out yawn. Bill Clinton and Bob Dole produced arguably the dulllest campaign in American history. The election reflected Dole's drab personality and Clinton's shallow opportunism, not the American environment. The Arkansas who regained the presidency diminished his place in history from a lack of vision. In a post-election ranking of American presidents which was conducted by Arthur Schlesinger Jr., American historians consigned Bill Clinton to the "low average" category. Four years later he might finish up or down. Also potential disasters loom — Whitewater, Kansas, Sean, Paula Jones and James R. H. the Indonesian business magnate.

Campaign 1996 had all the potential of yielding an ideological dogfight comparable to the 1936 Franklin D Roosevelt-Jack London contest. The material for a lively electoral battle was all there. The legacy of the Reagan and Bush eras, tended in Clinton's first term by a neo-conservative Congress, was in full bloom. Wealth and income disparities have widened in the United States. A mere one per cent of rich Americans possess 42 per cent of its total wealth. Less than five per cent own 75 per cent of the stocks and bonds. Income distribution is equally skewed. The top 20 per cent command 45 per cent of the national income; the bottom four per cent suffered income loss of five per cent. To make matters worse, the hard-won margins of security are in the process of being circumscribed. A moderate Health Bill pushed by Hillary Clinton was defeated in Congress. Welfare has been abolished as an entitlement. Affirmative action is under assault. The future of social security is threatened. America, once the leader in literacy, has climbed down to 45th place in the world.

The Democratic incumbent had an opportunity to seal the electorate's mandate to lead the country out of the morass of stagnating politics. Clinton had, after all, outlived the campaign in 1992 with attacks on Reaganomics and promises of a "fair deal" to the vulnerable and underprivileged citizens — guaranteed health for all, scholarships for college students, and bureaucratic trimming. These promises did cause consternation in some quarters, but he was elected. Since failures of his social policy were attributable to the Republicans' hold on the Congress, the established constituencies of the Democratic Party — blacks, hispanics and labour unions — had expected him to counter-attack. This was not to be.

After four years as president, Bill Clinton returned to the electorate hearing Republican eggs in the basket, effectively fulfilling the neo-conservatives' decades-long agenda of abolishing the New Deal, a moderate programme of social legislation which Franklin D Roosevelt had enacted to rescue America from internal war and economic depression. As Clinton stole the Republican programme, Robert Dole ran breathlessly behind, touting the incumbent that he was merely a "me too" president. Timidly do not win votes. As Dole's slide began, the yawn spread across the vast American landscape.

The presidential election underlined, nevertheless, the growing crisis of American politics. Citizens in increasing numbers are starting to feel disenfranchised. The media and its pundits showed much praise on Clinton's strategy, using adjectives like "brilliant" and "inspired" to describe his embrace of the conservative agenda. Wall Street sent signals of celebration; the morning after the election the Dow Jones, the stock and bond's bellwether, soared by 96.3 per cent. "Business was a big winner too," cooed the *New York Times*. But the electorate obviously felt differently. Only 42 per cent of voters actually voted; the lowest turnout in US history since 1924. In the conversations and interviews I found widespread alienation from the political process, especially among the young and underprivileged. Signs of a new militancy are appearing among students, blacks and labour. Under a newly elected president, the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) is re-organising, especially among workers outside its net — immigrants, farm workers and the servicing sector. In big cities, new citizens coalitions are starting to sprout. The next decade could prove to be another exciting one in American history, one that might effectively challenge the priorities of pax Americana.

A smuggling in Turtle Bay: Nowhere was pax Americana on cruder display than in Turtle Bay. There, the secretary-general of the United Nations was mugged without mercy. The US vetoed his reappointment for a second term; the vote was 14-1 in his favour. A shudder passed through the corridors of the UN building. Boutros Boutros-Ghali had been, in every substantive sense of the word, pliant toward the US. No one can point to a single major incident of his not complying with Washington's wishes. His sin, if any, was a proud style; Francophile tastes; a tendency to assert himself on matters of propriety and procedure, and occasionally an acerbic tongue, which once labelled Madeleine K. Albright, then US Ambassador to the UN, as "vulgar".

The American explanation that Boutros Ghali had failed to significantly trim UN expenses made no sense as he had trimmed the budget more than any other secretary-general. Also, the US was ill-qualified to offer the financial argument. Half of the UN's procurement contracts go to America. In addition, the US's presence in New York generates an estimated \$3.5 billion in economic benefits and 15,000 jobs in the city. Yet Washington owes \$1.5 billion in arrears to the world body.

Four reasons are offered for the mugging of Boutros Ghali. He fell prey first of all to Washington's determination to turn the world organisation into an extension of the State Department. Second, the US wanted not merely the reality but also the appearance of power over the UN. The veto against Ghali was a diplomatic equivalent of "showing the flag", specially to France. Third, the secretary-general was crushed by Clinton's electoral strategy of outflanking Dole. His fate was sealed last June when Robert Dole launched an attack on the UN and on Boutros Ghali. In response, Madeleine Albright echoed him, and Clinton embraced Dole's demand as his own. There is a fourth explanation offered by Third World delegates on the East River. They say that Israel and the US had wanted the secretary-general to suppress the report on the Qana massacre. He didn't. Be that as it may, Kofi Annan, the new secretary-general, is just what Washington wants: an American-trained chief executive officer. This was not an unexpected development as the obituary of the UN was already written — in Arab and Bosnian blood.

Savage wars of peace: The Middle East retained its status as the most active site of international warfare, overt and covert. The CIA did not ask the Congress to fund covert operations in Iran, arguing instead that the Iranian environment was unsuited at this time for successful covert work. But Israel pushed for destabilising the regime in Tehran,

and the American Congress appropriated \$19.8 million for this purpose. Details of the funds' disposition are not known. But no doubt appears to have been made on Iran's hardy regime. President Hassan Rafsanjani comfortably finished two terms, and Iran elected a new, more conservative leader, Naeqi Nuri.

Iraq aided a Kurdish Democratic Party faction led by Mustafa Barzani. The US launched air strikes on Iraq as punishment for this act of aggression. The bombing accomplished nothing and added a little lustre to Saddam Hussein's faded glory. An American army barracks was bombed in Saudi Arabia, and the Turkish prime minister was roughed up by his host in Libya. Civil war continued in Algeria where the ruling junta conferred more powers on itself. These were side-shows; the Middle East's future was being carved out in the fertile crescent, where Israel bores kept adding American muscles.

For a long while, America's faithful around the world would not admit to the fatal flaws of the Oslo agreement. But the true nature of the much publicised "peace accord" of November 1995 was apparent in 1996 even to its apologists. The agreement over which Bill Clinton had presided in a highly publicised White House ceremony was all but formally abrogated by Israel. Abrogation was, in fact, built into the agreement. It held promises but made no provision for their fulfilment. It did not forbid Israel from colonising the minuscule remnant of Arab Palestine on the West Bank; did not resolve the issues of rights to the land, water and other resources in the Occupied Territories; did not require the dismantling of the illegal Jewish settlements which impose heavy burdens of insecurity and scarcity on the native Arabs; did not resolve the question of Jerusalem which Israel occupies in violation of international law; did not offer rehabilitation or compensation to Palestinians who were so cruelly displaced in 1948 and again in 1967; and did not offer the Palestinians either sovereignty or control over the Occupied Territories.

Israel's Labour government remained deeply committed to keeping the armed settlers firmly implanted in the occupied land and to denying Arab claims to Jerusalem. In addition, it proceeded discreetly to consolidate and extend the structures of apartheid which had emerged in the occupied territories over three decades, and which were now sanctified by international agreements. "Peace" with the Arabs also provided Israel and the US with the regional climate to seek a new version of the "northern tier" strategy of which Israel and Turkey are to serve as primary pillars. Israel's nuclear arsenal expanded and its effectiveness and outreach was improved by a newer and more advanced delivery capability supplied largely by the US. Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon continued as did its hold on the Golan Heights. Given these circumstances, sporadic Arab resistance also occurred in occupied Palestine and Lebanon. These provided occasion for Israel to "show the flag". One such exhibition entitled, in April 1996, carpet bombings and artillery strikes which destroyed large portions of southern Lebanon's infrastructure and inflicted grievous damage on civilian lives and property. Arab countries and leaders expressed disapproval but deemed it important not to disturb the terms of Arab-Israeli peace.

Even so favourable a "peace accord" was viewed with disfavour by the zealots of Zion. One of them assassinated Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995. In summer 1996, fresh elections brought the right-wing Likud Party into power. Binayamin Netanyahu, Israel's new prime minister, took a harder line on squeezing the Arabs out of Jerusalem, on encircling and gradually strangulating Al-Haram Al-Sharif,

and on expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. An Arab protest in Jerusalem was severely suppressed. People died and governments protested but the tourist tunnel Israel had opened under Al-Aqsa's premises remained open. At year's end the peoples and governments of the Middle East were uncomfortably settling down to these "new facts". As Arabs show no sign of wavering from their posture of peace-by-acquiescence and the pro-Israeli presence in the Clinton administration's new "national security" team remains as strong as it was during the first term, the outlook for 1997 is more of the same.

The balloons, sectarian havens: For a civilisation that so proudly touts its heritage of enlightenment, secularism and liberalism, the modern West's historic engagements with racism, fascism and aggression have been truly ironic. Its latest manifestation occurred in Palestine and Bosnia where the US has promoted peace agreements which reward aggression handsomely, divide countries and peoples along religious lines and create patterns of apartheid and social discrimination. Unlike the Oslo Accord, which is devoid of any virtue associated with peace agreements, the Dayton Accord on Bosnia had some positive features. It provided for the punishment of war crimes, repatriation of refugees to their homes, free and fair elections, a levelling of military forces and Bosnia's unity as a federated state.

None of these substantive clauses — designed to deter future genocide, revoke ethnic cleansing and prevent the division of Bosnia into sectarian states — were enforced in 1996. Indicted war criminals including Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic still rule the Serbian roots and move around in full view of the NATO forces which are there to enforce the agreement but have not been given the mandate to do so. Elections were held but the playing field was not level; hence the result was to advance another step up the ladder of Bosnia's division along religious lines. Serbian militia blew up Muslim homes, attacked returning refugees and prevented people from voting in their home districts. So the outlook in Bosnia remains grim. War may resume when NATO withdraws. Its outcome is not easy to predict.

Russia's painful transition: Ailing Boris Yeltsin again courted the electorate and retained his post as president. But he lost control of the parliament to the Communist Party, which has made a dramatic come-back in Russia. Soon after, Yeltsin fell ill, underwent heart surgery and only toward the end of the year returned, pale and wobbly, to public life. His condition appeared to symbolise Russia's own, a symbolism confirmed by the fact that his expensive electoral campaign was bankrolled by the media mogul and reputed mafia leader Boris Berezovsky. Currently he is the deputy chairman of Russia's National Security Council and is known as the Godfather of the Kremlin.

Earlier in October, Yeltsin had dismissed General Alexander I. Lebed as national security adviser. In August, the Afghan war veteran had negotiated a settlement with Chechen nationalists who, against all odds and at high cost in civilian lives, had fought Russia down in a 20-month war. Peace is still holding in Chechnya but there is much tension still, and unresolved issues could re-ignite the war. Lebed,

who has an eye on the Russian presidency, is one Russian politician who has kept a close watch on US efforts to penetrate the energy-rich former Soviet Central Asian republics and provide them with pipeline outlets through Turkey and possibly Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Expanding NATO: In the US, bipartisan support has developed for the expansion of NATO into central and eastern Europe. Bob Dole favoured expansion by 1998. Bill Clinton promised it by 1999. Madeleine Albright, the US secretary of state designate, has been keen to push this agenda. Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic would welcome an admission. They are eager to be part in every way of the rich and powerful Western alliance. They also fear renewed Russian domination and NATO membership will prevent that. Russia is in dismay. It makes angry noises but has little clout to prevent NATO expansion. So it may happen.

Watch out, as its consequences may be far-reaching. Bringing the new members to the NATO level of preparedness will raise defence spending in America and Europe to new levels. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated American costs at \$125 billion in 15 years. It will also extend the defence parameters of NATO, requiring more men and better arms. Above all, it will arouse Russian anxieties beyond bearing. No less than 30 million Soviet citizens perished in World War II while the allies cynically let Stalin slug it out. Millions died also in World War I, and many millions from the Napoleonic invasion. Each time the invaders came through eastern and central Europe; each time they had to be pushed back through the same corridors. If NATO is expanded Russia will rearm, sooner or later, and another cold war will surely start.

Africa, internal implussions: The contradictions and vulnerabilities of post-colonial statehood continued to unravel states in Africa. In summer 1996, Liberia followed Rwanda and Somalia, and imploded from an excess of misrule and political segmentation. Zaire was next. Early in November, the town of Goma fell to Zairean rebels aided by Rwandan troops. An enormous exodus of refugees was made when the UN evacuated the area, leaving hapless Hutu with only a few days of food supply. Zairean President Mobutu battled cancer in a luxurious nursing home in Lausanne, Switzerland. At year's end the future of these imploded states was uncertain. Two predictions are possible.

One, Zaire is a rich country, endowed with important mineral resources. Therefore, it is expected that big corporations and big powers will not let go of it. Powerful UN and great power intervention there is on the anvil. Providence is reported, nevertheless, to be ending the halcyon days of US favourite Mobutu Sese Seku. Two, more Third World states may fall prey to imperialism. In Africa, Burundi and the Central African Republic are possible victims. Over lunch one day in November, Wole Soyinka, Nigeria's Nobel laureate in literature, argued persuasively that his country, too, can fall apart if the yoke of military dictatorship is not lifted from it.

He had a point. Countries which have imploded in recent years shared some common characteristics: They were long ruled by dictators. They were dem-

ographically heterogeneous. Distributive patterns in each country were vastly skewed in favour of the few. They were militarised dependencies which experienced unintended declines in military aid.

Latin America, globalisation and guerrillas: Latin American countries have witnessed in recent years high rates of growth fuelled by accelerated globalisation and investments by multinational corporations. Some, like Mexico, courted crisis from an excess of optimism and elite greed. All have experienced further losses of autonomy and accentuation of social inequalities. The discontent born of these developments is bringing the guerrilla back into the Latin American arena.

Guerrilla movements had dominated the international stage from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, when the Vietnamese defeated the superpower. Thereafter, armed struggle retreated from the scene. In 1996, a trend toward its return was discernible. This time it comes bearing not only books and guns but also computers. Mexico's three-year-old Zapatista rebellion spread from the Chiapas to other parts of the country. Its veiled Commander Marcos was on the Internet weekly, expounding with Latin aplomb on the necessity of revolution. Thousands of students at American universities were following his exhortation as their parents had followed Che Guevara's. In Colombia, armed struggle revived as the nearly forgotten FARC hit out again. As I write, international attention is on the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, which hold as hostages more than 100 foreign ambassadors and Peruvian dignitaries at the Japanese embassy in Lima.

Latin America's oldest revolutionary continued to survive American assaults. The Helms Bill, named after the veteran congressional conservative Richard Helms, further tightened the embargo against Cuba. Fidel Castro drove another hole in America's iron curtain around Cuba when he visited the Vatican and invited the Pope to visit Havana. His Eminence accepted the invitation.

Chaotic democracy in South Asia: Parliamentary elections in India ended last May the rule of the Indian National Congress. The runner up Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu nationalist organisation, could not muster the required parliamentary majority to hold office. A coalition of centrist parties and communists then formed a government with a provincial leader, Dev Gowda, as prime minister. His government has proved to be more stable than observers had predicted. The last elections and Dev Gowda's government reflect an important new trend in Indian politics toward decentralisation of power. Regional and caste-based parties which favour decentralisation made gains against the centralist Congress and BJP, and most ministers in Gowda's cabinet are, like him, men and women who made their mark in local politics and favour greater devolution of power from the centre to the provinces.

Gowda's government has been unsuccessful in dealing with the protracted insurgency in Kashmir. The region is disputed between India and Pakistan, and a popular insurgency there has been battling some 300,000 Indian troops. In October, local elections were held in Kashmir and, after governing it directly for many years, Delhi installed pro-India Farooq Abdullah as Kashmir's prime minister. Indian leaders expect that the restoration of elected government will contain Kashmir's insurgency. Discernible trends belie this expectation. At year's end India was planning to enlarge its massive military presence in Kashmir, and there was little abatement in the cycle of resistance and repression.

Pakistan's President Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari, a feudal chief belonging to the Pakistan People's Party, ended months of speculation when he dismissed the government of fellow feudal and party leader, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. His charges against her — corruption, interfering with the judiciary and human rights violations including murder of prisoners — were deemed true by most citizens, many of whom publicly celebrated Bhutto's ouster. Questions arose nevertheless about the constitutionality of presidential intervention on these grounds. Bhutto has appealed to the very judges she had been harassing earlier. Bhutto's husband, Asif Zardari, is in prison, now charged with involvement in the murder of his wife's brother, Murtaza Bhutto. Murtaza was feuding with his sister and had formed his own party. Feudal leaders are so called, it seems, because they feed a lot. The interim government has scheduled elections for 3 February. It may result in the victory of the Muslim League led by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Chaotic patterns were also discernible elsewhere. In Sri Lanka, Prime Minister Chandrika Jayawardhana's effort to reach a negotiated settlement with the Tamil Tigers was already blown to bits in 1995 by a Tiger bombing in Colombo. Civil war resumed in Sri Lanka with the army going on the offensive. In April 1996, it had its greatest "victory" — the capture of Jaffna, the stronghold of the Tamil Tigers. At the same time, the country continues to make good economic progress and Sri Lankan social indicators remain ahead of those of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. After months of street battles and demonstrations, in April Bangladesh's two female leaders confronted each other at the polls. Hasina Sheikh, daughter of Bangladesh's founding father, defeated her rival Khatida Zia to become prime minister.

No discussion of world politics in 1996 is possible without the mention of East Asian economies, which are forging ahead at break-neck speed. Japan has been in many respects its motor, but today China is the focal point of economic growth in Asia. In imperceptible ways East Asia is changing the nature of world politics — the notion of security and power. Meetings Bill Clinton cannot afford to miss are the summits of the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). He was there again in November. For good reasons: its 18 members account for 50 per cent of the world's gross domestic product and two-thirds of all US foreign trade. The high point of the summit was the meeting of Clinton with Chinese President Jiang Zemin. They differed; one twisted some, the other returned a cold smile. They agreed to meet again. Jiang Zemin will visit the US in 1997. Clinton will go to China in 1998. For now at least, China and the US agree to be antagonistic collaborators. The ups and downs of their relations are worth a close watch. And don't miss the trade figures as they hit a hundred billion dollars.

Overall, money cannot overcome the boredom of mediocrity, and power without vision has no meaning. The world appeared without leaders in 1996. No one stood out. No one imagined a better future. None truly spoke for the disinherited, and none served justice in places which begged for it — Bosnia, Palestine, Kashmir, Timor, Chechnya. No major novel was published, nor a great book of history or philosophy. It was truly the year of the yawn.



Illustration: Gennil Shafiq

Al-Ahram Weekly

What if....?

Sometimes, from the rubble of war, a phoenix peace will emerge. Nations, and those that would be nations, set aside their differences. With false smiles, and somewhat genuine intentions, leaders pretend to forget the violence, and put pen to paper. There, the first obstacle to peace has been surmounted.

But what if a bomb were to explode, or the people, on both sides, who were to benefit from the peace, feel that the accords struck are more of a capitulation than a solution? What if those rights and benefits to which they feel entitled are not those which are promised, let alone delivered? What if 1996 had not been 1996, and Netanyahu had not been elected? Or if he had at least understood that security stems from the conclusion of, rather than the intention to conclude, a comprehensive peace.

As it stands, however, 1996 cannot be changed. The intra-state remains the same, and with it, the vision of peace becomes more elusive. In itself, this fact is ironic. For as the rhetoric of politics favours terms like globalisation and prosperity over polarisation and containment, no discernible effort has been made to bring the Palestinians under this new banner. Like the Iraqis, the Palestinians are still in the grip of an economic stranglehold, while the rest of the world basks in the glow of activated capital markets and ISO-9000 certificates.

Netanyahu is not bothered by this. National priority has been given to the settlements. The right of hot pursuit within PNA territory is demanded. Land-for-peace has been sidelined. Security, he explains, is imperative. So, what could distinguish 1997 from its predecessor?

What if, as the anger drained from the process, the participants pulled back to the emotional and political centre? What if peace were hampered out with the dissipation of a socio-political and economic necessity versus an alter-state? Or if the hawks were to be doves, prosperity and security not merely for those with military might and humanitarianism actually targeted all humans? Would this still be the 1990s, or just a distant dream?

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New answers to old questions

Why have most inter-Arab economic projects failed to bear fruit? **Ibrahim Nafie** examines the factors that have hampered cooperation



economically and structurally to bolster Arab economies, achieve self-sufficiency in important areas of production and effectively bolster Arab economic cooperation.

Oil revenues played an important part in this process. Financial yields from this sector produced profound changes in the Arab economic structure, notably with regard to production and work ethics, giving rise to the idea that consumers had the right to consume without producing. Worse still was the belief in some parts of the Arab world that, with sufficient financial resources, development could be achieved independently from other Arab countries. While experience has shown that funds for investment alone are not the key to successful development, oil revenues have not been fully exploited for their benefits to joint Arab endeavours. Moreover, the movement of capital between Arab countries has failed to produce progress, encouraging instead a bilateral orientation over the desired multi-lateral orientation. OPEC, which, in the wake of the October War, was in a position to dominate

the international oil market and contribute to the establishment of a united Arab front, was quickly beset with division and dissent.

Many also had the impression that the movement of Arab labour during this period would be conducive to inter-Arab cooperation. Unfortunately, this prediction proved groundless. In fact, the opposite occurred, since no organised mechanism or clear policy existed to regulate the flow of labour. Those countries with the greatest financial resources were able to meet their labour needs at the expense of the poorer countries. This produced grossly uneven patterns of development in the region as a whole in which labour-exporting countries found themselves at a distinct disadvantage. Mismanagement of human resources thus created numerous distortions in the Arab labour market and resulted in the squandering of one of the Arab world's principal strengths. As for levels of inter-Arab trade, they have remained extremely low, accounting for less than 10 per cent of total foreign trade in the past few years. Moreover, the commodity con-

figuration of trade is highly distorted. The Arabs are highly dependent on exports of crude oil and other primary materials, while development, and even military, requirements must be imported from abroad. In addition, the enormous rise in imports that accompanied the boom in oil revenues has increased the trend toward consumerism and raised demand for goods and services to levels far higher than those domestic supply can meet. A large portion of the national income has therefore been allocated to "current expenditures", detracting considerably from the investment process. All efforts to enhance inter-Arab trade have focused primarily on alleviating bureaucratic snags, which is by no means insignificant, but we have ignored far more important measures, such as rectifying the distortion in the import-export structure.

A final word must be said about the institutions for Arab cooperation. Most suffer large budgetary deficits because some members have been remiss in paying their dues. Indeed, one of these institutions was unable to pay the salaries of its employees. This is a poignant indicator of the fragility of joint Arab endeavour.

Most of these organisations were established for political motives, without taking into consideration actual economic factors. As a result, their functions tend to overlap, creating unnecessary rivalries. In addition, many of their cadres appear to have lost sight of the purpose of these institutions, and have come to view them as a quick route to personal gain, not as means of achieving national goals. Financing these institutions is stigmatised as "charity", and this has compounded the sense that there is no clear, unanimous and well-formulated strategy for Arab action. Finally, fundamental issues are being neglected as we dwell on subsidiary issues. The Arabs have not yet reached an agreement on how to bring about the organic integration of different national production structures, achieve food security, and solve issues of vital concern to the Arab world.

Huntington back in the limelight

Does the threat of world war still loom large, in a post Cold War world? **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** discusses Huntington's ideas on the clash of civilisations on the eve of the 21st century

A war breaks out between China and Vietnam. It suddenly escalates into a world war, with the United States, Europe and Russia on one side, China, Japan and most Islamic states, mainly those with radical Islamic forces in power, on the other. These Islamic forces have invaded Israel, thus triggering a number of counter-attacks. Serbia and Croatia come together to divide Bosnia between them; Algeria launches a nuclear missile against Marseille.

This imaginary scenario, set in 2010, is used by Samuel P. Huntington to illustrate his famous "clash of civilisations" theory. First expounded in an article published by *Foreign Affairs* two years ago, his theory is now the subject of a book entitled "The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order", an excerpt of which was published in the last issue of *Foreign Affairs* under the title "The West Unique, not Universal".

The Huntington theory is the antithesis of the "End of History" theory put forward a few years earlier by another American scholar, Francis Fukuyama, which postulates that after the collapse of the bipolar world order, ideological conflict will no longer be the predominant reason for confrontation worldwide. What Fukuyama means by the end of history is not the end of human endeavour but, with the definitive victory of liberalism and capitalism, the end of conflict over the fundamental principles governing human behaviour.

Huntington believes, on the contrary, that conflict over fundamental

principles has not been overcome, but that it has simply acquired a cultural/civilisational expression instead of the ideological-cum-military expression that prevailed under the bipolar world order. There is much to corroborate his theory, but a basic question remains: how can such intangibles as "civilisation" and "culture" replace concrete disciplines like politics, economics and ideological dogma as basic frames of reference without exposing humankind to widespread destabilisation?

I believe one answer could be that factors of destabilisation in our contemporary world do not stem only from the cataclysms provoked by the breakdown of the bipolar world order based on the confrontation of two antagonistic ideologies, but also from the accomplishments of modern technology, notably the Information Revolution, which has led to an ever-increasing "shrinking" of the planet and to the acceleration of history. The internationalisation of information, particularly in its audiovisual form, has made people feel that their identity is not determined only in terms of the place of their birth, their ancestral traditions and cultural legacy, but also of some new form of planetary affiliation. However, as the latter does not provide equal opportunities for the various segments of the international community, nor engender among them the feeling that they share a common fate, conflict is unavoidable.

Still, it is difficult to pinpoint what generates conflict in the world of today. One of its manifestations is wars by proxy, as graphically illustrated by the wars in the former Yugoslavia between the Serbs, the Croats and the Bosnian Muslims, who were backed by what Huntington calls their "civilisational kin", the Slavs, the Germans, and the Muslims respectively. These wars by proxy serve as an escape valve for tensions which can no longer be resolved through war between global actors in the post-bipolar global order.

In the past, conflicts were addressed in terms of theories which postulated that historical events could be analysed scientifically and explained rationally. By the same token, the future could be predicted, and hence planned, with a fair degree of certainty, not only in socialist, but even in many capitalist, societies. Today we know that much of what depended on planning and predicting the future has not materialised, and the new approach to science is that it is not based on certainties but on statistical probabilities. Still, planning cannot be totally discarded because prophetic measures must be taken to avert predictable ecological — even societal — catastrophes.

In a way, Huntington's theory is an expression in social science of the present impasse in natural sciences, its popularity due in large measure to the failures encountered by the twentieth century's experiments with social engineering. Although enormous difficulties still stand in the way of Man's ambitions to master his fate, this does not mean that science has failed to deliver on its promise, only

that it is currently suffering from growing pains, what some scholars have described as an "epistemological rupture".

Appearances to the contrary, Huntington's theory is not of a purely academic character. His article in *Foreign Affairs* describes Western civilisation as "unique", with a combination of specific factors that give it a distinctive quality. He emphasises that "modernisation" is not to be identified with "westernisation", each civilisation having its own particular path to modernity. He contends that attempts to westernise non-western societies in the aim of modernising them, like the experiment of Peter the Great in Russia and of Atatürk in Turkey, have failed. Claiming that "NATO is the security organisation of Western civilisation", he concludes that Turkish and Greek ties to the organisation will weaken. He points out that "withdrawal from NATO is the declared goal of the Welfare (Islamic) Party in Turkey and that (Orthodox) Greece is becoming as much an ally of Russia as it is a member of NATO".

As Huntington sees it, the West has two basic pillars: North America and Western Europe. The case can be made that a main source of future clashes is competition rather than complementarity between these two pillars. But, in Huntington's words, the responsibility "to preserve and renew the unique qualities of Western civilisation falls overwhelmingly on the United States of America", obviously the world power Huntington considers most qualified to lead the world.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

New year, new hope

By Naguib Mahfouz

A few wishes for 1997 seem apt. Foremost, perhaps, is that Dr. El-Ganzouri's government continues to successfully rejuvenate the economy. Stock market activity has reached new levels, and large amounts of money which had been idly lying in bank accounts are now being invested in the future. The main concern of economic policy, however, is to increase production, eradicate unemployment and increase the income of the average Egyptian.

I also hope that the new year will be a period in which democracy is consolidated. Accountability, transparency and greater attention to human rights are all to be hoped for. The security forces appear to be winning their battle against extremists and have largely succeeded in containing terrorism. I hope that in the new year other forms of terrorism, specifically intellectual terrorism, will be defeated. A more enlightened approach towards education, combined with improved employment prospects, would be of enormous help in combating fanaticism.

Let us hope that in 1997 the fruits of economic progress and intellectual awareness begin to be enjoyed throughout the land and do not remain prerogatives of the metropolis.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Debates 1996

Secularism versus Islamism

"Radical ideologies tend to flourish in times of crises... Of all radical ideologies, religious ones are the most dangerous, since they claim the status of divine revelation, and to question them leads to charges of heresy... The present and future can only unfold peacefully in a spirit of pluralism, of religious, socio-political, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic tolerance and co-existence."

Saadeddin Ibrahim
(Al-Ahram Weekly, 18 January)

"Secularism implies the severing of the connection between religion and the conduct of worldly affairs. God, the church, the day of judgement — are made to count for nothing in determining right from wrong. The triumph of secularism, which from the sixties onwards reached its apogee in the West... coincided, in Egypt and elsewhere, with a resurgence in calls to re-elevate Islam as the prime determinant of individual and public behaviour."

Adel Hussein
(Al-Ahram Weekly, 22 February)

Structural adjustment's safety nets

"Policy makers and aid donors, in league with international financial institutions, are willing, it seems, to spare no effort when it comes to establishing safety nets. They do so, though, so as to avoid taking a simpler, though politically more difficult action, and that is to re-allocate investment in such a way as to reach those who are really in need."

Galal Amin
(Al-Ahram Weekly, 7 March)

"A properly functioning social safety net system is essential to minimise the largely unavoidable costs associated with certain reforms. International experience confirms that with a proper mix and sequencing of policies, supported by properly targeted social safety net provisions and institution strengthening, the region can decisively improve its growth, employment and social sector performance."

Mohamed El-Erian
(Al-Ahram Weekly, 28 March)

Pan-Arabism

"Since the 1950s, the pan-Arab movement has been dominated by this millenarian credo — manifested in the fiery slogans and ideological tracts, which can be quickly read

and interpreted as you please, and in a selective, romantic rendering of the past to serve as a model for what the Arab nation should be like in the future... The philosophy of pan-Arabism has retreated into a shell of rigid, glorified, revivalism; it has no time to waste on critical analysis and empirical study."

Lutfi El-Khalil
(Al-Ahram Weekly, 9 May)

"The belief that Arabs are capable of recapturing some of their past revolutionary nationalism and militancy is not unjustified. What the prospects are in the present epoch is a question which is perhaps worth dreaming about day and night for that is how utopias are produced — a vision of a new world full of promise and hope. While such dreams may be dismissed as unrealistic, it is only mental projections which transcend the given which count as intellectual."

Archile Mafje
(Al-Ahram Weekly, 29 August)

Peace options

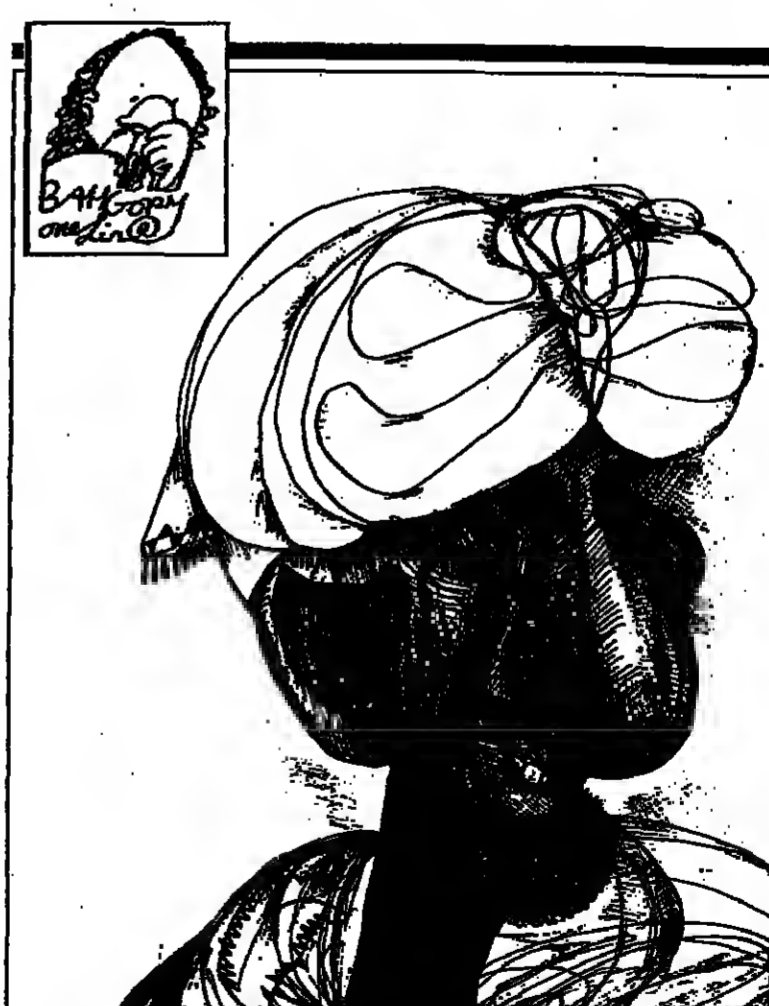
"The present crisis is, I think, a glimmering of the end of the two-state solution whose unworkability Oslo, perhaps unconsciously, embodies. Israelis and Palestinians are too intertwined with each other in history, experience and actuality to separate, even though each proclaims the need for separate statehood. The challenge is to find a peaceful way in which to co-exist not as warring Jews, Muslims, and Christians, but as equal citizens in the same land."

Edward Said
(Al-Ahram Weekly, 3 October)

"The new obstacles, daily placed by the Israeli occupation in the way of Palestinian destiny, do not imply that the state option must now retreat, that the only option now is the long term historical solution of one state for two peoples. On the contrary, the hell let loose by the Israeli occupation on the lives of Palestinians, the atmosphere of growing suspicion between Israelis and Palestinians, the military, psychological and educational chasm that separates the two peoples all contrive to make of the two state option the most realistic of solutions."

Mahmoud Darwish
(Al-Ahram Weekly, 3 October)

Compiled by Hala Saqr



I portrayed Sadig Al-Mahdi with a fox's nose, and eyes almost dissimulated by triangular ears which mask his piercing glance. His white peacock's turban is echoed by the white scarf slung about his shoulders, emphasising his neck and features of bronze, and underlining the Sudanese and African quality of his features. I gave him an ardent expression despite his smile, as though his white crown had brought him no benefits. His neck is the root of a tree planted in the land, the very earth, and the Nile of the Sudan.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Drugs and lies

The Egyptian government, along with the general public, have been aware for some time now of the role Israel plays in regional drug dealing. It is common knowledge that Israel has been a key player in drug trafficking, and that its illegal activities reached a peak during the Lebanese civil war, when security was in a state of chaos and drug mafias were able to join hands with the Israeli authorities to pursue their illicit trade.

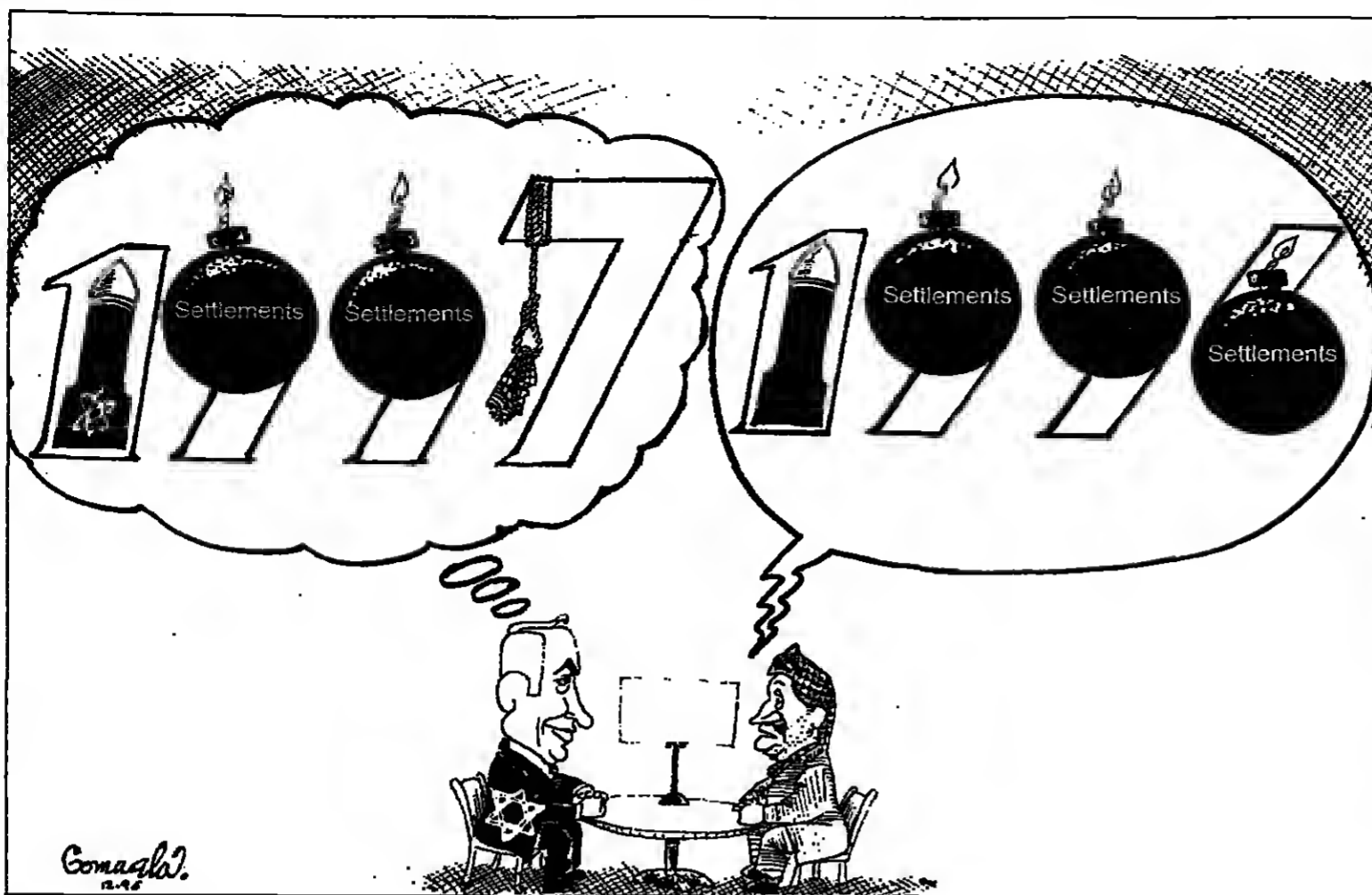
Drugs entered Arab countries via border posts under Israeli control in what many commentators have seen as an attempt by Israel to precipitate a large drug problem among its Arab neighbours. Proceeds from the sale of drugs were also used to finance the civil war in Lebanon, in the hope that by upsetting the fragile balance of power in that beleaguered country Israel would gain an advantage over Syria. And this is, after all, what Israel eventually achieved when it occupied an occupation that continues — the security zone in Southern Lebanon.

Recent reports published in the *Sunday Times* about the drug smuggling activities of the Israeli military come, therefore, as no surprise. That eight officers in the Israeli army should have confessed to such illegal activities, and admitted that they were conducted with the blessings of the army's highest command, simply confirms earlier suspicions. The *Sunday Times* reports stated that the Israelis admitted to collaborating closely with drug dealers in procuring drugs and then selling them in Arab countries in an attempt to flood the market. Their activities, they admitted, began before the 1967 War. And Israel remains to this day a major source for the procurement of drugs within the region.

It does not take too great a stretch of the imagination to realise that a large proportion of the revenues accrued from the procurement and sale of drugs ended up in the bank accounts of Israel's top military brass. This fact alone places the Israeli military on the same footing as a criminal gang rather than a professional army. According to the Israeli officers the motives behind their involvement in the drugs trade were largely an attempt to demoralise Egyptian troops, an aim that failed dramatically. Egyptian combatants during the October war and before distinguished themselves by their commitment and discipline.

Following these revelations of Israeli involvement in the illegal drugs trade, Israeli spokesmen predictably issued a denial. Israeli officials went further when they began to hint to allies that if any country in the region had condoned drug trafficking then it was Syria. Damascus, of course, has been vociferous in its denial of such allegations and following the admissions in the *Sunday Times* the world now knows who is at the centre of the trade. Following these revelations, which come hot on the heels of admissions by Israeli officers of the murder of Egyptian prisoners of war, it would be a mistake for Egypt simply to let them rest. Egyptian drug control authorities should make public all the information they hold on Israel's drug activity, just as they should make public information they possess about Israeli war crimes.

If the perpetrators of such crimes are allowed to walk free with impunity, then the peace efforts become no more than a blanket to cover crimes that history can never forgive.



The year of seeing clearly

As the smoke from the peace process clears, sparks continue to fly in the Arab world. Gamil Matar looks forward to fewer illusions

The year that is drawing to a close has been neither worse nor better than most, for Arabs. The Arab nation has accomplished nothing great, nothing that could fill it with a sense of pride; nothing that future generations will care to commemorate. Nor, however, has the year been marred by a catastrophe: there have been no stunning military defeats, no occupations of Arab countries by their neighbours, and no new civil wars.

Yet, as the year draws to an end, none of the region's major problems have been solved. Indeed, one of the most important issues has grown more complex. During the first half of the year, the processes of peace and violence progressed apace, both conducted with equal enthusiasm and activity. On many occasions, in fact, the two processes intersected. The peace process was interrupted by violence, and violence abated from time to time when it appeared that progress was being made in the liberation of Palestinian territory — although it soon became clear that, as some land was restored to its people, other areas were expropriated for the construction of new Israeli settlements.

A succession of blockades imposed on liberated Palestinian territory, and the consequent deterioration of the Palestinian people's economic situation inside, fired the violence anew. Instead of offering assistance to the Palestinians, however, the international community held a conference at Sharm El-Sheikh, engineered for the purpose of rescuing Peres.

Netanyahu's victory placed most Arab governments in an extremely sensitive, not to say embarrassing, position. Politicians had poured enormous effort and costly resources into their attempt to convince Arab public opinion that Zionism has changed; that Zionism today is fundamentally different from the Zionism which has fuelled Jewish invasions of Palestinian territory since the beginning of the century, led to the expulsion of the Palestinians from their nation from the 1940s onwards, and triggered three expansionist wars.

Indeed, influential opinion-makers in a number of Arab countries had been convinced — or at least pretended to believe — that Peres, the post-Madrid Israeli negotiator, and the Oslo accords all represented a new Zionism, which had replaced the old. Suddenly, however, Netanyahu broke the bubble, confirming that Zionism had not changed in any way: it is still synonymous with aggression, occupation, expropriation, expansionism, and

the inhuman treatment of a people considered inherently inferior to the Jews.

Such was the shock caused by Netanyahu's victory that the Arab governments felt compelled to convene. The impetus generated by this shock, in fact, can be better understood in light of the fact that, since the second Gulf War, every attempt to hold an Arab summit failed abysmally. Netanyahu's electoral triumph achieved what had heretofore been impossible, and this gives some idea of the desperate predicament in which Arab leaders found themselves. Many had believed that the Washington and Oslo accords had led to an historic understanding between the Arabs and Israel. Netanyahu, however, was prompt to dispel this illusion, rudely awakening the Arab leaders to the harsh reality that this understanding, far from being historic, was in fact ephemeral, incomplete, and limited to only one section of Israeli society. More importantly, it suddenly dawned upon them that the understanding had not even been reached with the state of Israel as such, a discovery which generated disappointment and frustration to last through the new year.

Leaving aside the balanced and reasoned resolutions which resulted from the Arab summit, no other Arab gathering has achieved anything noteworthy this past year. The Arab League, for instance, did not rise to the challenge posed by several events which shook the Arab world. It did not accord the Qana massacre the importance it merited. It remained as diffident as ever, reluctant to intervene in order to avoid deterioration to Arab relations. The Arab League Council did nothing to confirm the theory that it is a vehicle for the improvement of the League's performance as a regional organisation and for the enhancement of the secretary-general's jurisdiction — tasks which, had they been carried out, would have empowered the League to institute reforms and propose new initiatives.

If anything, it was a burden, a barrier and not an incentive to change. The Council, as well as the League's Economic and Social Council, had the audacity to refuse rapid ratification of an Arab free trade zone, thus impeding the implementation of a resolution passed by the Arab summit.

Egypt, on the other hand, continued its staunch efforts to lay new, more realistic foundations for a new phase of joint Arab economic endeavour. Egypt's incentive in this domain, I believe, was the chaos that plagues inter-Arab

relations, which are currently strained by the proliferation of contradictory proposals for regional projects, some inspired by European initiatives, others by the US and Israel, and others still oriented towards the Islamic-Arabian world.

Paralleling — in fact, compounding — this chaos is inter-Arab relations this year are the strains besetting regional configurations throughout the Arab world. Within both the Gulf Cooperation Council and the North African (Maghrib) Regional Council, relations have cooled, occasionally erupting in tensions and acrimony. As the year ends, contentions over vital issues have marked these blocs: cases in point are the GCC's stance on Iraq and Iran, and the Maghrib Council's position on developments in Europe-North African cooperation (the Polisario) to Algeria, as well as the project for a European rapid-deployment force in North Africa.

We can also predict that Iraq's influence will increase in the formulation of Arab policy throughout the new year. Several indicators suggest that many countries, even outside the Gulf and the Arabian peninsula, have begun to modify their position towards Iraq. Egypt is in the process of revising its policy, as is Jordan, as frustration in trade, industry and business increases due to the lack of any significant improvement to relations with Kuwait and other Arabian peninsula nations. It seems likely, therefore, that Iraq will be in a position to resume selectively its financial and commercial relations with other Arab countries. In other words, it appears that important changes in Arab relations are afoot. These will be due, at least in part, to the return of Iraq to the inter-Arab network, and in part to the influence of Cairo, the logical extension of the role it has chosen to play since Netanyahu reached power.

Several other factors support the contention that inter-Arab relations will be transformed. First, the possibility of establishing a cooperative bloc made up of nations bordering the Indian Ocean, an idea which appeared to be a purely academic question when it was floated over a year ago, now seems to have taken a more assertive political direction. Several Arabian Gulf countries have demonstrated a definite inclination to create a bloc of this sort, as have pressure groups in both South Africa and India.

This eastern orientation may be furthered by a second factor. Over the past year, political leaders and groups

Soapbox

Freedom of expression

To many, freedom of expression is nothing more than the right to criticise. But regardless of the criteria we use, we can safely concede the theory of Peter Strawson, the author of *Individuals* (1959). He contends that freedom of expression includes freedom of conscience, thought and behaviour along with the responsibilities, and actions of the individual as a member of a community.

This theory, influenced by enlightenment thought and eighteenth-century philosophy, may seem out of place in a world fast moving in another direction. Enlightenment concepts seem odd at a time when ideologies are spread according to the wish of the "powerful." But it is possible to reintroduce freedom of expression as a value to the media itself. This would be a statement that this freedom is a realistic ideal. Freedom of expression was originally conceived to foster individual freedom; the concept enabled individuals to break away from the grip of religious institutions which dominated the Middle Ages. Freedom of expression constituted one of the foundations on which the culture of individualism was built. But this same culture invented the means of dominating human conscience. The circle has been completed. Today, the institutions which individual culture created are being challenged by the concept on which they are based.

Will freedom of thought triumph? No one can be sure. The resolution of the conflict between the ideals of the enlightenment philosophers, and reality, would imply stagnation — the end of history. There may be hope that Strawson's "middle way" can be achieved — but this will be on mean fear.



This week's Soapbox speaker is cultural editor of the daily Al-Ahram, and head of the Drama House at the Ministry of Culture.

Sami Khashaba

Looking in at ourselves

World orders, old or new? Hassan Hanafi sees no difference. Real change, he writes, must come first from within

In recent years, there has been a growing debate over the new world order that emerged following the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the old world order it supplanted. The controversy extends to whether there is, in fact, any difference between the two orders. Those who perceive significant change base their argument on the fact that polarisation has been superseded by a bipolar world capable of resolving major crises (Bosnia and Palestine are usually cited as evidence). Opponents argue that the substance of the old order remains unchanged — only the format has changed. The world is still divided into major inter-regional vectors of polarisation — Europe and the US, China and the US, Japan and the US — as well as sub-regional areas — France and Germany in Europe, Japan and Korea or Taiwan and Singapore in Asia; even within the US itself, between Democrats and Republicans over budgetary issues.

Elite and masses, rulers and ruled, media and intellectual circles all express an increasing sense that domestic events are strongly influenced by developments abroad, and that Arab policies may be advanced or hampered by the bipolar world order, just as they had been in the bipolar world. The Arabs, therefore, must prepare themselves strategically, in the political, economic and military domains, and seek new relationships allowing them to keep pace with the current changes.

It may well be that this school of thought is grounded in the illusion that the world has indeed changed, and that change of this sort can occur within the space of a year or two, or perhaps a decade or two. At the beginning of the 1970s, people were speaking of the end of East-West confrontation, the beginning of the Cold War and prospects for peaceful coexistence. Such changes do not occur within the space of twenty years. Indeed, some phases of history take much longer, perhaps several generations or more than a century. The modern West drew its origins from the religious reform movement of the 15th century, territorial expansion westward and eastward in the name of new discoveries, the end of feudalism and the beginning of capitalism. The modern West is still in a process of renewal, according to some, or of dissolution, according to others. The ascendancy of the West took six centuries and is not over yet. Moreover, the many hopes and fantasies pinned on the 21st century are injecting it with new blood.

The illusion of change in the world order may arise from a sense of shock engendered by the radical transformation of political systems. One such transformation was the collapse of the Soviet Union, seven decades after the victorious socialist revolution of 1917. This collapse marked the end of the struggles that had led to the establishment of socialist systems in eastern Europe after World War II, and put paid to the aspirations of Third World liberation move-

ments, to which the USSR had offered moral sustenance and material support. The illusion of change may also result from a form of intellectual dependency and the wholesale transfer of analyses originating in the West. Certainly, the capitalist West and the US have undergone a change. The most formidable adversary exists no longer. The Western drive to build up its military-industrial might, establish alliances such as NATO, and plan for the security of its strategic resources was motivated entirely by the perception that the Soviet enemy posed a grave threat to the capitalist system. The sense of peril was exacerbated by the development of strong socialist currents in the Third World, the influence of Arab and African socialism, and the prominent role played by Marxist-oriented parties in national liberation movements.

And the Arabs? We have lost an ally of long standing; otherwise, there has been no essential change. Yet we have grown accustomed to applying the logic of others, giving priority in the other over the self, and interpreting everything that happens here in terms of external factors. Perhaps this tendency is due to the fact that we are unable to analyse ourselves — an inability which may stem from fear, or escapism. Any analysis of the local situation must ultimately come up against the existing political system. To deter suspicion or accusation, therefore, our analyses begin with the outside, only later investigation the impact of external events upon ourselves. The outside world has become the centre, even in our own minds, we are truly the periphery.

Yet there may be another explanation for the illusion which holds sway over so many minds: it may be the result of a desire to appear up-to-date on the most recent international relations theories and political analyses. We are always eager to demonstrate that we have read the latest findings published by specialised symposia — perhaps in the hope that the West will recognise such expertise, and may be even reward us for it. This profane knowledge makes it possible to delude people at home, who know, first-hand, the hardship of everyday life, and who clearly see the causes of their poverty and degradation. Thanks to specialised theories and academic analysis, it is possible to convey the impression that the situation is far more complex than the poor could possibly imagine, that change is far more difficult than they conceive, and that their salvation is assured by the gargantuan academicians who will explain the new world order, in somewhat simplified terms.

The inclination to view ourselves as we are seen from the outside has become endemic to how we perceive the world. Under the old world order, we saw all popular movements as a direct result of rising prices or foreign ag-

gression, or explained demands for general freedoms in light of external factors. It is as though we were lifeless copies propelled into motion by an external agent. Our anger and sympathies were directed by the stamp we supported: pro-Soviet if we were socialists, pro-Western, capitalist and US if we were liberals, pro-Iran if we were Islamists and pro-Iraq, Libya and Syria if we were Arab nationalists.

Nor have the circumstances of the Arabs changed radically since the transition to the new world order. The defeat of June 1967 and the victory of October 1973 occurred under the old order. When the Rogers Plan was introduced, it met with Arab government support and popular resistance; the divide remains the same with regard to the current peace treaties. The Israeli arms race has continued at the same manic pace under old and new orders. Accumulation of debts, corruption, repression of civil liberties, occupation of territory, the blockade of Iraq, inter-Arab discord, the Gulf War and its consequences, peace settlements and inflation all originate in the old world order.

Even at the international level, the transition from a balance of power to a balance of interests, various forms of polarisation, trans-national corporations and regional and international conflicts have changed little with the transition from the old world order to the new. The east-west polarisation still exists, albeit between China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines, on the one hand, and western Europe and the US on the other: the war, this time, is being waged over economic interests and markets. The borders within each camp are still clearly marked out, although they now involve forms of future cooperation and areas of conflicting interest.

The Arab world order must be given priority over the external world order. Nothing can be achieved abroad if it is not first established at home. The leverage of the Arabs abroad is no greater or less than our domestic influence. Respect and confidence abroad can only be based upon the self-respect and confidence we build for ourselves. The Arab order must be determined by the Arabs, not by any world order, old or new, past or future.

The Arab order did not change when the new world order was decreed. For both rulers and ruled, constancy is a virtue and change an evil. We all remember "Everything is doomed to perdition except for the face of the Lord," but we have forgotten that "God, in His creation, intends great deeds." Arab culture has so entrenched itself in the state that change has become synonymous with disgrace; inertia is a form of self-defence.

The question of freedom — for individuals, groups, organisations, political parties and even nations — still represents a major impediment to change in the Arab world.

Change cannot occur in the absence of appropriate mechanisms, foremost by law. Freedom of thought and expression is a legitimate right guaranteed by Arab constitutions and international charters. No one should be persecuted because of his opinion, or accused of heresy on the grounds of a conjecture. Related to the freedom of thought and expression are guarantees against arbitrary arrest, torture, and blockade.

Were liberty to be transformed into a socio-political system, it would be a democracy in which the people choose their political representatives. Freedom and democracy are two sides of the same coin. A free individual is one who lives in a democratic society, in which individual liberties are guaranteed under a democratic form of government. People, by nature, are diverse and sometimes conflict in their opinions, schools of thought, and interests; therefore, plurality is one of the features of democracy. The right to differ is a legitimate, inherent right. Everyone has something to contribute; no one is above criticism. Yet monopolies on opinion prevail. We have brought calamities, dissension and wars upon ourselves because of these monopolies, because we have rejected advice and plurality of opinion. The field of conjecture should be open to all human beings.

Perhaps this should be the starting point for the Arabs. Freedom, democracy and plurality are a part of ancient history, our golden age, the age of Al-Biruni, Al-Mutanabi and Ibn Sina. Different schools of jurisprudence, numerous intellectual trends and diverse Sufi orders coexisted, giving rise to a vibrant theological exchange. Indeed the Qur'an, the fount of Arab culture, is itself an example of reasoned debate with adversaries. Apostasy, exclusion and elimination, on the other hand, are the tools of an authority which claims a monopoly over thought and increases its own power under the pretext of defending the law.

Only when each Arab country has prepared itself can the process of Arab integration be undertaken, beginning with the Maghreb, the Fertile Crescent and the Arabian Peninsula.

Integration of the entire Arab world may be based on this starting point. Arab investment will return, and Arab industry, agriculture and services will flourish. This will occur regardless of whether the world order is old or new. Indeed, the world order must change as the result of a new Arab order, one in which the Arabs as a bloc exercise international influence. To change the world order, we must first change the Arab order, to change the Arab order, we must begin with ourselves.

The writer is a professor of philosophy at Cairo University.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Hassan Abdalla (Paintings)
Cairo Opera Gallery, Opera House
Grounds, Giza, Tel 342 0392. Daily
10am-5pm. Until 28 Dec.

Usoo El-Hadi Artworks (Engravings)
Islamic Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh
El-Morshedy St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
Daily ex. Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm.
Until 29 Dec.

**The Life and Writings of Gertrude
Bell**
British Council Gallery, 192 El-Nil
St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319. Daily 9am-
5pm. Until 30 Dec.

Tim Madgett (Photographs)
Spanish Cultural Centre, 200 Boulvar
Giza, Tel 342 0392. Daily 10am-5pm.
Until 31 Dec.

**International Exhibition of Mini-
atures**
Zohair Khattab House, behind El-
Ain Helwan, Daily 10am-10pm. Un-
til 31 Dec.

Isa Al-Hadi (Paintings)
Boutar Gallery, Main Complex, U.C.
El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436.
Daily ex. Fri, 9am-5pm. Until 31 Dec.

Shaker El-Masawi (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 364 Ahmed Orabi
St, Mohandessin. Tel 340 8293.
Daily 10am-5pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 3
Jan.

Umar Mohamed (Sculptures)
El-Nasser Shiba (Bakr)
Boutar Gallery, 3 El-Nasser St, Corner
of Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8293.
Daily ex. Sat, 10am-5pm & 5pm-8pm.
Until 3 Jan.

Art Fair
Boutar Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gharib
St, across Mohamed Mahmoud St,
Dokki. Tel 340 8293. Daily ex. Fri, 10am-5pm.
Until 9 Jan.

Emmet Dewhurst
Boutar Gallery, 3 Champollion
St, off Tahrir St, Tel 340 8293. Daily
11am-5pm. Until 16 Jan.

**Sixth Cairo International Biennale
Cairo Opera Gallery, Opera House
Grounds, Giza. Tel 342 0392. Daily
10am-5pm. Until 15 March.**

**The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mo-
hammad Mahmoud Khalil**
1 Karam El-Dokki St, Dokki. Tel
336 5276. Daily ex. Mon, 10am-6pm.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir St, Downtown. Tel
375 4319. Daily ex. Fri, 9am-
5pm. Fri 9am-11pm & 1pm-5pm.

Capitole Museum
Rue de la Concorde, Old Cairo.
Tel 342 0392. Daily ex. Fri, 10am-5pm.
Fri 10am-1pm & 1pm-5pm.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed
Maher St, Bab El
Khalifa. Tel 340 8293.
990/390 1520.
Daily ex. Fri, 9am-
5pm. Fri 9am-
11pm & 1pm-5pm.

**Museum of Modern
Egyptian Art**
Opera House Grounds,
Giza. Tel 340 8293.
Daily ex. Mon, 10am-
5pm & 5pm-8pm.

Gertrude Bell
British Council Gallery, 192 El-Nil
St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319. Daily 9am-
5pm. Until 30 Dec.

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Angels, eagles, turkeys

**David Blake,
demented, delighted,
catches the first and last
trains of the year**

The year is coming to a close. But before pressing the fast forward button-cum-station requires a re-wind of 1996, just at the moment that it is about to become history.

Through the season's greetings seeps a question. Does music have much relevance to Cairo's cultural life? I do not mean here to criticise the opera house, or indeed anything that has been offered in the past twelve months. But one can, legitimately, ask where the audience is. Remove the passers-through and those with freebies, and no one is left. There really isn't a regular audience.

The surface changes but beneath everything remains the same. At the end of last year there was a general note of optimism. Things were getting better, people were turning up. Well, that optimism has proved to be ill-founded. Many splendid things were put before the public but the more splendid they were the smaller the audience. Art-biz, show-biz, big-biz or no-biz at all fill the first couple of rows leaving the rest of the hall more or less empty. Is this because of cost? It is cheaper to have a seat at the opera for an international concert than it is to go to the many of the better cinemas or most restaurants.

In the past twelve months it is not opera that has dominated at the opera house but piano, followed in hot pursuit, by violins. Yet as chamber music and full orchestral concerts reached their highest standard yet since the new house was built the chimerical floating audience continued to move in and out, though mostly out.

The year's first mass audience turnout, however, was for a voice — Montserrat Cabellé — still legendary, vocally celestial and beaming with high spirits. Later, on 24 January, the Monte Carlo Ballet Company arrived with one of the year's gems, a new piece by Uwe Scholze to the music of Mozart's *Jeune Fille* piano concerto, with costumes and decor by Karl Lagerfeld. Brilliant, light and very very sad, exasperatingly fitting the music. The player, invisible, was a wonder to hear. January also saw a *Ballet in Maschera* revival with Mona Ruffa as Oscar, Hassan Kari the king, and an American Viennese, Carol Byers, as a noble Amelia. January also saw Nevine Alouba and David Hales in a leader recital. Hugo Wolf, Rachmaninov, Stravinsky and Sherif Mohieddin's settings of Amal Dowd's poems attracted a large audience and elicited a stylish show from the two performers.

In early February the violinists began to arrive. First came Hassan Sharara, playing his father's second violin concerto. Hot on his heels came Yasser El-Serfy, playing Brahms' violin concerto, supposedly to mark the centenary of the composer's death. The two differed in approach but brought an international feeling of style and depth to the Main Hall.

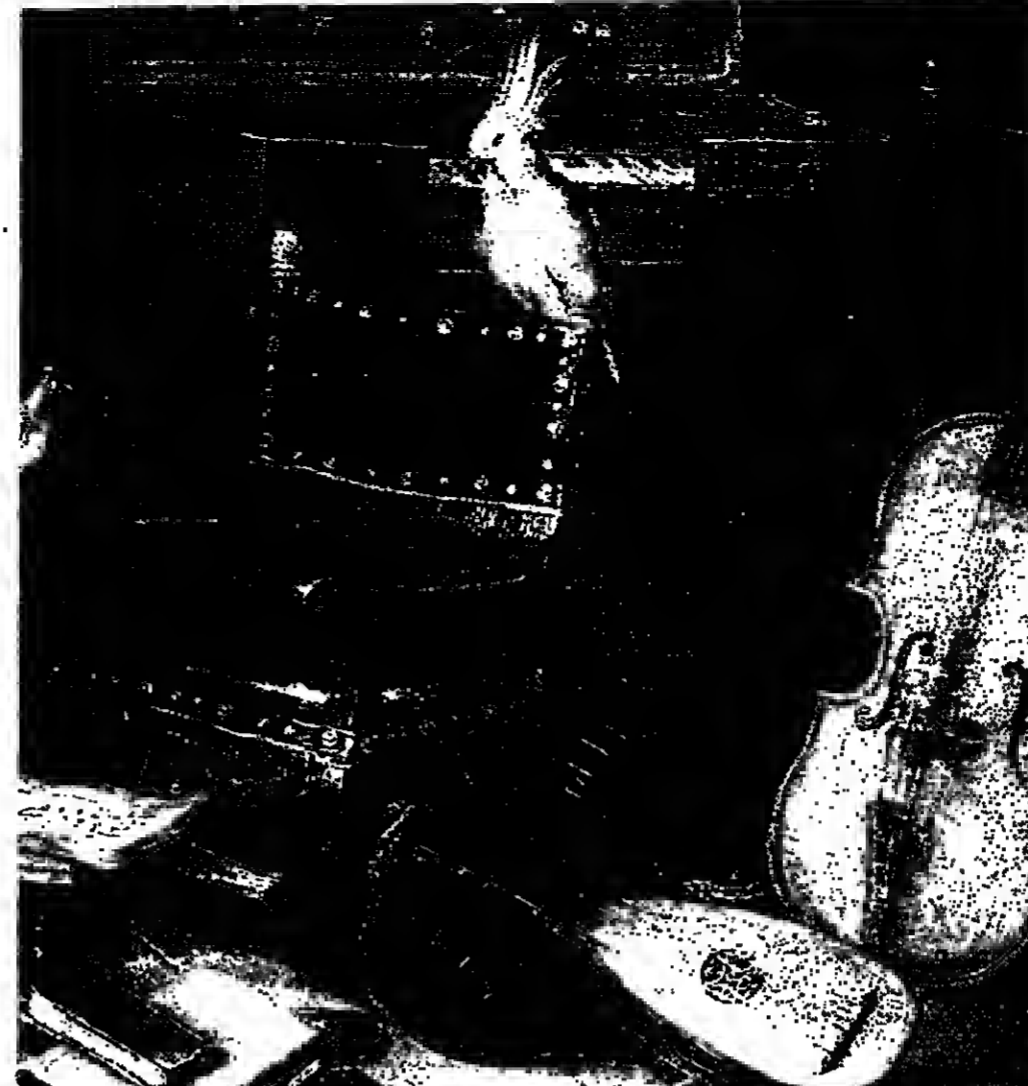
March is the birthday month of both the Amadeus and the Akhenaten Chamber orchestras. Both are brave and reliable but in the case of the Amadeus too much Beethoven is really too much. Still, they play brightly. No need for grunge, but they could choose something a little closer to the present century. The Akhenaten has the advantage of Sherif Mohieddin's improving stick technique and a wider repertoire.

Mid March, and Ramzi Yasser and Nevine Alouba gave a joint concert of Mozart concert arias. Both shone, she particularly in the nasty technical tricks demanded from the arias. The technique never tarnished. Both artists were indifferent to the traps the composer sets for players. March also brought *Swan Lake*, by the Cairo Opera Ballet, with Emma Kamel dancing the white swan queen. She was no diva bird — there was none of that don't-touch-me-or-you'll-ruffle-my-feathers — but warm and loving. Constantin Grinok was the prince and Eva Prokopovna was a wonderfully vulgar black queen.

Group Indigo, a sharp-edged gang, proved a live pick-up from the classical world. Without any below the belt jabs they brought the whole classical scene toppling down in high force. Four tenors, one counter-tenor, baritone and piano, performing songs and madrigals: the Lindberg *Baby*, the *Rumba Renversée* and Harry Lime all came to traumatic life.

Late March and Manuel Mohieddin gave a harp recital. A Bach partita, very wonderful, with Dussek and Spohr to sweeten the programme. Also at the end of March, one of the true revelations of the year, a warm, generous, perfectly planned and modulated performance of the Verdi requiem conducted by Larry P. Corbin. It was the vocal event of the year. Ratiba El-Hefni and her co-performers were seemingly inspired to give this huge work an elemental, instinctive frame. There was nothing coldly intellectual. As for Ratiba El-Hefni, some said she shouldn't, some said she couldn't, but she did, and how. It takes a lifetime to face up to the difficulties of such music and she faced them.

After this event the month ended with a cool Pearl Fishers. A deadly little opera that, warm



Allegory of Hearing, Jan van Kessel, mid-17th century

sweetly as it passes on. It is young-old opera these days, and continues to roll like the sea of which the libretto tells.

Early April brought the beginnings of the flock of pianists when Eric Himy performed Rachmaninov's *Paganini Variations*, hugely built, fine and fiery. On the 18th came the Bolshoi. Balletic standards and values were up-ended by the authentic group from Moscow. *Spartacus* burst on the stage with Alexander Vetrov as Crassus. His vanity as the Roman knight was almost insane. The leaps in the air, body bent backwards, head almost touching the feet, were astounding. *La Bayadère* followed, mad passions to the music of Minkus. Who is he? No one ever quite found out.

April also brought three *Robinsons* which improved as they went along. Roberto Cuninghame, tenor, had a strong voice and gave a big theatre performance; Carole Dumas and Nevine Alouba, were the two Muscetas, the first classical grand opera, the second, caring and tender. El-Sisi conducted competently, but a fall off from last year. Ratiba El-Hefni, as Mimi, was an actress before a singer in this production. One suspected that she did not like the tempo. A thrilling *Sacre du printemps* blew through the month, with El-Saeedi and the Cairo Symphony giving a hall-mark Stravinsky. Hassan Sharara, again with El-Saeedi, in Beethoven's D major violin concerto, was almost too careful until he threw fate to the winds and almost danced to the end. At the same concert El-Saeedi continued the Tchaikovsky striptease, this time reaching the Russian's underclothes. Right or wrong, undergarments seemed to suit.

In the third week of May the Brigham Young University Chamber Orchestra appeared at the Main Hall, with Beethoven's Fifth and Chausson's *Poem for violin and orchestra*. Bret Jackson was a svelte and sultry soloist. Her view was a teenage dream of the Venusberg. In the same week was El-Saeedi's conducting of Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony*. The surface of the music never cloyed or fell into self pity. It was steamy, decadent and disturbing.

June, and the midsummer solstice sends people to the seaside. Audiences dwindle, and the spare becomes practically invisible. The open-air theatre, though, helps the situation, with its terraces open to the breezes. It is sometimes fun to be under the deep lavender Cairo sky watching the summer staple of folkloric troupes. Sometimes, soon they say, the new metro line will have a station just a few steps away from the opera house. One hopes that, when this happens, it will attract rather more than the car crowd.

In the Main Hall the redoubtable Pro Helvetia, doing heroic work for new things, presented a concert of Giacinto Scelsi's small pieces for orchestra. Cairo Symphony and, at last, a large audience, enjoyed these things. Carl Nielson's clarinet concerto followed, with Mohamed Hamdi as soloist. He was a joy to listen to. Then Jung Wytenbach, the conductor for the evening, gave his own piece, *De Matall*, with a brave

baritone, Kurt Widmer, to sing.

June also brought Aziz El-Shawan's *Anas Wogood*. This long, interesting opera has been reviewed in detail. The story, the words and the situation seem not to fit the music, which calls for a lyricism Shawan is loath to provide. Had the composer lived he might have written an opera with the necessary melody. Cast, costume and scenery were all equal to their roles but charming scenes were punctuated by long passages of little interest.

Through July and August various attempts were made to set the sails to the wind of a new festival, the theatre at the Cinéclaire. Cairo looks its best from these heights, a huge, alarm-dazzle in front of which nothing but the wind can keep presence. Ghada Shaker played Mozart. Sherif Mohieddin and the orchestra did their best, but the only performer who understood the wind was Nevine Alouba.

Down in the shelter of the Ewart Hall Samir Bayoumi gave a dramatic piano concert — his first. At the start of a Liszt Hungarian rhapsody he stalled. He stopped the performance, gathered together his forces, and bravely began again. It worked, and the concert showed that Cairo has another pianist who, if he can leap the hurdles, will join Yasser Mukhtar. His teacher, Saevelev Demidov, the sustaining influence of a group of Cairo pianists, left town for Moscow and home. Bereavement reigned. Bayoumi was one of the survivors.

September brought more blood and thunder — plus a lot of water, but no wind, as the hyped Verdi *Otello* sailed into the Qait Bey fortress. Bloodstained it began and bloodstained it ended. An opening night audience amazed and partly bewildered was the skeleton of a good show. It played through to the end on night one. But the rest was silence. The production was grandly conceived, sung well but sank due to imperfect amplifications, lack of rehearsal and bungling behind the scenes. The bitter operatic truth is, don't try your strength on the opera scene unless you are bodily fit. Patches count, this show had none.

What had punch was the visit of the Alvin Ailey ballet from New York. In a few of their performances they reached the same heights as the big Bolshoi. A sensation unparalleled. No body snatchers here. They glammed and flushed like immortals, down here on a visit from paradise.

September, a quiet and beautiful concert from pianist James Avery, maintains recollections amid the turmoil of ballet and opera flops, failures and successes. Avery played Janacek and Debussy with transcendence.

October came with El-Saeedi, and the Shostakovitch *Concerto for Piano and Trumpet*, op. 35. This had Magdi Boghosian to blow as excitingly as a jazz master and introduced another pianist, Julia Zilberquist, a star in orbit, riveting a large audience.

October — ballet, Gombouris, small stage, big and handsome dancers. Unique poise, all from the Royal Ballet of Flanders. This was the

best dance show of the year, in spite of the Russo-American hurricane.

Dancing in from Lebanon came the Caracalla Troupe. Much joy. Enough clothes to sink them but they took to the air, flying rugs, carpets and abayas, all airborne. Then the story about the gongs on at the fall of Troy turned into a strapping great musical with the whole gang taken to the Lebanese mountains in song.

More madness with a meaning from Tim Fischer and Corn Frost. Fischer and Frost arrived from Berlin and bedlam with love and kisses, some poisoned.

November had interest. It showed Imaz Mustafa slowly coming to terms with Bellini's *Norma*. One day she may. During this month an Arab musical festival hit the Cairo Opera, culminating in a visitation from Tunis of a seven-foot tall, red-haired goddess with a three-octave voice — Sophia Sadek — super-model, Solas, Elektra and female Rolling Stone. She must be somewhere, may she soon be here again.

The opera gave a new turn on the Pearl Fishers. The robots of last year had turned human and it went well, home and safe, with a new production of an opera of old-fashioned affection. Then came Georges Kazzian with his group, Sabli. He makes his own way, firm, clear and without fuss. The music is unique. So was the atmosphere in the Ewart Hall where he played. The audience — some love, some hate, some go, some stay and shout for more. He gives directly, no stops in the suburbs. Many of the audience are having a fast taste, and this is a flavour that grows on you. November grew always better. Late in the month was the second visit here of, you can guess, a pianist — Stefan Vlader. The pianists come and come. His Beethoven Fifth was a joy. Only thanks will be adequate. Words are no good to deal with such mastery.

Two pro-Helvetia concerts during this month offered the best performances and music of the year. On the 14th the Egyptian Chamber Orchestra under El-Saeidi gave Sander Vares's Transylvanian dances and Frank Martin's *Ballade for Flute, Orchestra and Piano*, with soloist Inas Abdel-Daim, wedged between Mozart and Tchaikovsky. The entire performance was electrifying. This energy spilled over into the other evening, the 28 November, when Chas Usor, an Nigerian-Soviet resident in Zurich, gave a song cycle from his opera, the *Solo Sclipsa*, Akhenaten's Hymn to the Sun. This momentous sounding aria introduced to Cairo a young tenor with talents that amazed — a beautiful tone with power to cope with the content of the music and the vocal finesse to surpass with ease its appalling difficulties.

The end of November saw a concert of another sort — operas and songs of yesterday by Alim Selim (soprano) and Tamer Tawfik. She is headed for the opera stage — strange quality in style with a long, strong voice — another three-octave girl. He is a light-looking tenor who belies his appearance, because he's a heavy, strong one, also headed for the opera.

Best month of the year. December and Christmas looms. Flying turkey breasts, loins of this and that, with the cinema dominating cultural pages. *Le Corsaire* came. *Traviata* also came, heralding the year 1997. Before closing time, another visitor to Cairo, Ramzi Yasser, but his hand. A player from Moscow, Andrei Diav stepped into his place in the Rachmaninov No 2 Concerto. That old thing again, but with Diav was new once more. It struck the Opera House like a bolt of light with El-Saeedi conducting. Those who missed the concert should be kicking themselves.

What arrived the week before Christmas was the unexpected visit to the Gombouris Theatre of the flamenco group Albarizuela from Madrid. They are not interested in defeat. The breath left our bodies before their exalted grandeur. The milk train does after all stop here sometimes, bringing the Fernando Belmonte family's tango, stampings and posturings and the de-moed grandeur flamenco dance and song makes possible.

With flamenco like this, you are supposed to fall down like the Kathakali of India. It is more than dance, theatre, it is religion. A terror of beauty, courage and giving, an absolute commitment before which the rest of the theatre is largely cardboard. Everything sweated and glowed, exuding that dangerous realm where ordinary men and their lives become immortal and boldness begins. The shouts, the colours, men in black, lean as runner beans. Women in peacock-coloured trunks, like birds of prey. They left the stage, as theatre and the earth and took us up through the roof. Olei Olei Happy Christmas.

Still in the doldrums

Highpoints, lowpoints? Hani Mustafa speaks to key players in the cinema industry about the year on film

• Ali Abu Shadi, film critic and head of censorship bureau:

The most significant event of 1996 for the Egyptian film industry was Prime Minister El-Ghazali's decision to annul tax and customs restrictions on the industry. The growing involvement of businessmen in the industry may well spell a revival for Egyptian cinema, though of course this will not be felt before sometime. The involvement of businessmen may also create new outlets for film distribution abroad. On a negative note, the cancellation of the Ismailia International Festival for Documentary and Short Feature Films is a loss.

The best films of the year are *Laila Sakhina* (Hot Night), *Afrit Al-Asphalt* (Demons of the Asphalt) and *Ya Donia Ya Gharami* (My Life, My Love). This was from Hassan '96, which I consider to be a landmark, not least because of Ahmed Zaki's first-rate performance.

• Radwan El-Kashif, director:

The worrying thing this year for Egyptian cinema is that the studios are still being treated out to satellite channels and will continue to be for several years to come. This will not only contribute to the cinema crisis but will eventually destroy the industry completely. One might add that this constitutes only part of the long process of attrition of Egyptian cinema. At first the studios were nationalised. Now they are being privatised and used and abused regardless

of their original function.

As to the best films of 1996, I regret to say that I paid little attention to new releases. Since January I've been extremely busy working on my new film. It's probably the first Egyptian feature film to be set in the oases — not a very easy logistic task.

• Mohamed Khan, director:

Egyptian cinema is in a state of crisis, and there are several proposed solutions, but they remain inadequate in my opinion. The involvement of businessmen in the film industry is not necessarily a good solution. If businessmen would only provide funding and keep out of the execution of the film, well and fine. But if they decide to meddle with an industry that has its own economic patterns and specifically, particularly since a businessman will have vested commercial interests, then the relationship will be problematic. But one possible solution is for banks to create special facilities for the film industry, which would do much to encourage producers. I wouldn't say that there was an outstanding film this year, but there were some good films in 1996, such as *Marhaban Ya Ibn Al-Am* (Hello Cousin), *Afrit Al-Asphalt* (Demons of the Asphalt) and *Ya Donia Ya Gharami* (My Life, My Love).

• Ahmed Maher, director:

At this year's Cairo International Film Festival, I noticed that the promotional emphasis was still on sex, which of course creates an image

of cinema as catering for just that. And two weeks of international films aren't sufficient, in any case, to create a discerning audience. Another sad thing I noticed this year was during the shooting of *Afrit Al-Asphalt* (Twilight) my most recent film. I found that all the studios were rented out to satellite channels for several years, even though they weren't using them. Now it's already very hard for a film director to get a producer, but when he or she does, there is no studio. The result? The continuous decline of the Egyptian film industry. As to the recent meetings between filmmakers and businessmen, well, something positive might come out of it — because the present state of Egyptian cinema could not possibly be worse.

The best Egyptian films I saw this year was Osama Fawzi's *Afrit Al-Asphalt* (Demons of the Asphalt) and *Ya Donia Ya Gharami* (My Life, My Love).

• Sayed Said, film critic and director:

There's no doubt that the cinema industry is still in the doldrums. In fact things were probably a bit worse in 1996. Only about 6 or 7 films were made. On the other hand, there is a greater understanding of the language of cinema and film aesthetics among those who work in the industry. As to the funding crisis, businessmen have offered help in rejuvenating the industry. Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri's decisions regarding the issue will

facilitate investments in the industry, thus helping upgrade its technological aspects. But in the process of privatisation, the state should intervene to protect the industry.

The best Egyptian films of 1996 are Osama Fawzi's *Afrit Al-Asphalt* (Demons of the Asphalt) and Magdi Ahmed Ali's *Ya Donia Ya Gharami* (My Life, My Love).

• Mustafa Zikri, script writer:

It seems to me that the cinema continues to flounder. Frankly, I don't understand all this talk about meetings with businessmen who are to help revive the industry, establish new studios and so on. I suspect that quite a number of those who attend these meetings are publicity seekers. The true base for any revival in the industry will always be production.

A few months ago I was invited to the Carthage Film Festival in my capacity as writer of the screen play for Osama Fawzi's *Afrit Al-Asphalt* (Demons of the Asphalt). The film got lots of excellent reviews and some damning ones. I found myself siding with the critics who did not like the film, because I myself no longer like it. I've just finished writing the scenario for another film, *Genat Al-Shayatin* (Paradise of Devils), to be directed by Osama Fawzi.

At both Carthage and Cairo film festivals I watched some excellent 1996 films, among them Michelangelo Antonioni's last film *Beyond the Clouds*.

Around the galleries

A RETROSPECTIVE of the work of Cairo-born Greek artist Constantinos Xenakis at the Hussein Sabhi Museum of Fine Arts in Alexandria shows a prolific, multi-talented artist who has distinguished himself as painter, engraver and sculptor.

Geometric compositions in gouache by Nefert Rumeih at the Nagai Gallery at Cairo Atelier reproduce plant formations and are, according to the artist, meant as objects of meditation.

Wassouf Shewail's installation, which won the Grand-Prix of the Sixth Cairo International Biennale, on show at the Cairo Opera Gallery, is a precise study of alienation.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashry



Nefert Rumeih

Look back in anguish

Despite a hopeful beginning, 1996's theatrical bright spots were few and far between, writes **Nehad Selaiha**

1996 got off to a bright start with the promise of many good things to come. The excitement created by the appointment of Sami Khashaba as head of the state theatre sector (renamed the Drama House) — a somewhat curious appointment at the end of the previous year had not yet died down, and his ambitious plans and vigorous statements made hopes run high. In a long interview published on this page one month after he was saddled with the job he talked a lot of solid practical common sense, spoke of revolutionising the infrastructure of the state theatre, of the urgent need to create new performance spaces and to revise and amend the crippling and outdated administrative and financial regulations governing the department, and put forward the possibility of cooperating with the private sector in funding and marketing productions. The great expectations aroused by Khashaba were bolstered by the appointment of Hoda Wafdi, who has been efficiently running Al-Hanager Centre since its inception, as head of the National, and of Isam El-Sayed, a bright young director, as head of the Comedy.

Other reasons for optimism were the creation by the minister of culture of annual national awards for theatre, along the lines of the cinema awards — something these people have been lobbying for for the past ten years, and the decision by the head of the Cultural Development Fund, Samir Gharchi, to administer financial help to free theatre artists and amateurs through a special committee set up for this purpose. The higher theatre committee of the Supreme Council for Culture was entrusted with organising the theatre competitions and it did not lose time in appointing a permanent secretariat for the awards from the ranks of its members and a list of possible jurors was submitted to the minister. Soon enough a nine-member jury headed by Abdel-Qadir Al-Qadi was appointed by ministerial decree, and they immediately set to work, visiting all the shows that applied to take part in the competition.

Meanwhile, the committee entrusted by the Cultural Development Fund to promote free and amateur theatre groups had already worked out its criteria and guiding principles in a series of comprehensive discussions and was busy wading through masses of proposals. Originally, the members had been told that they had 17 performance and rehearsal spaces at their disposal and a generous, flexible fund; and although the number of promised spaces soon dwindled to one, the small floating theatre in Giza, they remained undaunted, and their first sponsored production, *The Deluge*, by the Nubian Club in Cairo, opened there and ran successfully for a month. It was followed by another, immediately after, and by the summer the committee had approved at least a dozen projects, given much needed financial assistance to three amateur theatre festivals and decided to subsidise at least two provincial theatre societies on an annual basis. At the time it looked as if the theatre amateurs of Egypt had at last found a haven and a place under the sun.

In a different quarter too, the Music and Popular Arts Sector, headed by Abdel-Ghaffar Ouda, things looked flourishing at the beginning of the year. Next to the Balloon Theatre, which successfully housed an adaptation of Bizet's *Carmina*, another of the American musical *Les Misérables*, and a lyrical tribute to the late historian Gamal Hindawi, a new and elegant chamber theatre was receiving the final touches to become the permanent home of the new Al-Ghad experimental theatre company, formed in 1995. By the time the building was finished, this young and active company, the brainchild of Hossain Abdel-Qadir, had already built an impressive repertoire of seven productions which included plays by Sophocles, Tagore and Soyuzka, and toured with them all over the country, performing in improvised spaces as well as in conventional theatres. But at the opening of the new theatre the man who had fathered the company and given two years of ceaseless, backbreaking work to setting it up was conspicuous by his absence. A few weeks before the opening he had resigned because of differences with Ouda, his superior and the head of the sector, over the management of the company and its financial policies. To keep his company together and protect his actors from succumbing to the lure of television and the commercial theatre, Abdel-Qadir had devised a wise and realistic policy of periodic rewards and incentives. Curiously, Ouda stuck to the same policy after Abdel-Qadir's resignation, which led many to surmise that the differences between the two men were rooted in a clash of personalities. Ironically, within a few months, and before the year was out, Ouda himself resigned his post in protest against the ministry's interference with his financial running of the sector, which included, of course, the unorthodox financial status of Al-Ghad company. More ironic still is the fact that when Sami Khashaba was considering ways to attract actors back to the state theatre, he started by following the example set by Al-Ghad company.

In retrospect, the absence of Abdel-Qadir from the opening ceremony of Al-Ghad Theatre has come to seem an ominous sign. Things seemed to wilt and shrivel afterwards. But for a few odd flashes here and there, the vents that followed in the latter part of the year make a sad and woeful tale. It started with a legal wrangle over the land on which Mohammed Farid Theatre, the home of the Comedy company, stands. After the first earthquake the building, already rickety and in a shabby state, had become unsafe, and is badly in need of rebuilding. The problem is that once the building is down, the government may lose all claim to the land on which it stands, and it can legally revert to its private owners. It is worth noting now and you can imagine what a howl the owners will wage to get it back and how anxious they are for the building to come down. There goes up in a puff of smoke all Khashaba's dreams of replacing the ancient, tumble down theatre with a modern theatrical complex.

The Ministry of Culture had already made a tragic mistake in pulling down El-Samer Theatre in the hope



Sherine Al-Ansari in *Stories from The Arabian Nights*

of rebuilding it on a more ambitious scale. But once the walls were down, the Italian owners of the land went to court to get it back. Again, the site is worth millions. And while the legal dispute continues, the site which was once the home of all provincial theatre artists and annually hosted the fifty best cultural palaces and homes productions, stands deserted.

Another dream momentarily glowed, then spluttered and fizzled out. A year after plans were mooted to develop the site of the Big Floating theatre in Giza the deplorable acoustics and primitive equipment it was in. And when the Department of Antiquities declared the building complex, which includes the Institute of Arabic Music a historical building the state theatre sector suddenly found itself a performance space down. The youth theatre was now homeless, as was the head of the National Centre for theatre, director and actor Mahmoud Al-Hideini, who woke up one morning to find the priceless contents of the few rooms allocated to the Centre in the Institute of Arabic Music stacked on the pavement. He went to the press and made anguished appeals to the minister of culture before being pacified with a promise of a brand new base in some building under construction in the grounds of the Opera.

Plans to house the Youth Theatre in the store-rooms of the National backstage when Hoda Wafdi, the theatre's director, indignantly objected. Her record in production this year, in both the big and small halls of the theatre, has topped any other state company, and if you add to these the excellent productions she sponsored at Al-Hanager this year, you can comfortably vote her the most active and productive manager of the year. She was, as might be expected, loath to hand over the National's small theatre. Eventually a compromise was reached. Only a few rooms of the storage space of the National will be temporarily used by the Youth staff, with the minimum of alterations — just to make them habitable, with the clear understanding that the performance spaces of the National are sacrosanct.

In one area, the state theatre sector could have scored an easy goal, and it nearly did at the last minute, however, it stopped short of getting the ball. Alexandria, one of very few cities that boast a variety of unused performance spaces, has no permanent theatre company. When I mentioned this to Khashaba a year ago, he reassured me that it was foremost in his mind. A few weeks ago I met him at the National when I went to see Pinter's *Caretaker* and he told me that once more, at long last, Alexandria would have its own permanent theatre company, with production all the year round. I was overjoyed. I had taught at the Theatre Department in Alexandria University and have many students and friends there. With a permanent theatre company, they would not have to migrate to Cairo to do out a living. It took a short time, however, for me to sober up and reluctantly surrender my heady dreams. No progress has as yet been made. There is no technical or executive body, no allocated budget or site, and no official ministerial decree or plan of operation. One wonders if the workshop which was directly spawned by the awarding of Best Direction to El-Talia production *The Collar and the Bracelet* at the last Experimental Theatre Festival, and which is currently conducted by the award-winning team in the hope of coming up with another winner, will prove more substantial and real than the Alexandrian charade.

The year contained two more disappointments. The first was the indefinite putting off of the second Arab Theatre Encounter which was supposed to be held in December this year. The first Encounter, held the year before last under the umbrella of the Cultural Palaces Organisation, had proved dull and uninspiring; with one or two exceptions, both the local and guest shows had been artistically very modest; the research papers submitted at the focal seminar were a mishmash of old material and outdated ideas; and the final ceremony was marked by ugly scenes of bickering and vilification over the competition awards. This year, it was decided to entrust the Encounter to the State Theatre Sector and many people advised that the competition be abandoned. Nevertheless, the competition stayed on the agenda and the Ministry of Culture came up with the odd idea of imposing on all the participants a single historical dramatic text (the central theme of the Encounter was to be History in the Theatre) as the subject of their productions. The chosen text was Ahmed Shawqi's undramatic and unwieldy poetic drama *Majnoon Leila* (in the English translation *Qais and Leila*) and the only person to respond positively to this quirky proposition was the Egyptian director Samir Al-Asfour who immediately got down to work and laid down his directorial conception on paper. The Encounter was scheduled for 20 December, but by the end of November, only a few contacts with other Arab theatre companies had been made and their response was mostly lukewarm and when the minister of culture announced that the Encounter had been postponed, few people could even fathom surprise.

The second disappointment concerned the peremptory abolition of the state awards for theatre after the appointed jury had done its work and submitted its verdict in a closed envelope to the minister of culture on 6 November. It was supposed to be made public within a couple of days. But, mysteriously, it took 20 days for a small notice to appear in the newspapers to the effect that the minister had decided to cancel the awards (this year only for good, it was not made clear) because some of the nominations had leaked to the press before being ratified by the ministry. It was an excuse difficult to take seriously. For those who missed some of the leaks, or might want to know the verdict in full, here are the jury's nominations: the award for most distinguished production of the year went to Galal El-Shargawi's *Dostor Yo Spadna* (Pardon Masters), which the public censor, then Dumriya Sharaftoddin, had decided to ban, only to have her decision overruled by President Mubarak after vociferous protests staged by the Actors Syndicate; *Mama America* was voted second most distinguished production of the year, with its director, Mohamed Sobhi, winning the award for best director, and its designer, Hussein Al-Isah, best stage-designer; the third production award was won by Mohamed Salahawi's *Al-Gamir* (The Chain), also directed by El-Shargawi.

Al-Hanager productions also walked off with three awards. Mahmoud Diab's *A Land Where Flowers Do Not Grow* won its author (who died prematurely in the late eighties after a spell of heavy depression) the award for best dramatic text, and its leading actress, Sawwan Badr, best actress; *Tiger Joseph*, a low-budget production by a mixed group of young professionals and amateurs was nominated for best costumes while Yehia Al-Fakhani won best actor for his performance in the National's *Awta Abu Marwa* (Awta the Jackknife); best

music went to the Balloon's adaptation of *Les Misérables*; best choreography went to Walid Aoum's *The Last Interview*, and best foreign text in translation was awarded to Mohamed Enani for his verse translation of *King Lear* which was performed at Al-Ghad Theatre under the title *The Symphony of Lear* in a production directed by Imtiaz Abdel-Fattah.

A month before the awards were cancelled the head of the Cultural Development Fund had disbanded his organisation's committee for the promotion of amateur theatre retroactively, without, incidentally, informing its coordinator or members. While this might seem bureaucratic par for the course, it did have unfortunate ramifications given that, on the strength of the word of a committee that had not been informed that it had been disbanded, some amateur theatre groups had taken the go-ahead and borrowed money to spend on their productions in the belief that they would be reimbursed. They naturally found themselves in a terrible financial quandary. Fortunately the Fund has promised to try to help them out, which, is the only decent course of action.

1996, however, was not completely devoid of theatrical joy, and a substantial part of it was provided by the young men and women of the Egyptian theatre. At Al-Hanager, I watched a string of exciting, delightful productions, all by young artists, which rank among the best of Egyptian theatre this year. Iftat Yehia's *Quicksand*, Sarah Enani's *Vienna* (both adapted from literary sources), Harold Pinter's *Old Times*, directed by Mohamed Abdul So'oud, Karim Al-Tonsi's dance performance *Al-Radwa*, Hani Abdel-Mutamid's *The Clowns*, Ashraf Farouk's *Tiger Joseph*, and Hana' Abdel-Fattah's *Mannequin Party*. At the same venue, I also enjoyed Roger Assaf's stirring *Tales of 1882* and Hassan Al-Wazir's moving production of Diab's *A Land Where Flowers Do Not Grow*. Other treats came from the National where I watched with excitement the debut of a new woman playwright, Nadia Al-Baklawi. *The Glow*, her first play to find its way to the boards, was deeply poetic in language and conception, and was widely acclaimed by the critics. On New Year's Eve, another play by the same writer, *Love and Death Sonata*, will grace Salah Abdel-Saboor's hall at Al-Talia. At the National too, the great Samir Al-Asfour treated us to an excellent musical version of Ahmed Shawqi's famous verse comedy, *El-Sit Huda*, which infuriated the traditionalists and created a heated controversy, while Mohamed Abdel-Hadi displayed his sensitive understanding of Pinter in his production *The Caretaker*.

Other memorable theatrical experiences in 1996 were provided by a breath-taking Kabuki production of Euripides' *Medea*, performed by a Japanese company at the Opera House, by Al-Talia's *The Collar and the Bracelet* which won Egypt the Best Direction award at the last Experimental Theatre Festival, by Imtiaz Abdel-Fattah's *The Symphony of Lear*, Walid Aoum's *The Last Interview*, and by a fascinating one-woman show, conceived, designed, directed and acted by a brilliant young theatre artist called Sherine Al-Ansari. Al-Ansari's *Stories from The Arabian Nights*, which she brilliantly acted and narrated with the help of puppets in a romantic tent set up in the courtyard of Wikalat Al-Ghouri, was the last production I saw in 1996 and it felt like a sudden glow that made the departing year momentarily look almost as bright as when it started.

Plain Talk

Whenever India is mentioned Ghandi's image springs to mind. In many ways Ghandi was India. I cannot think of any other leader as closely associated with his country as he was. More than that, one feels that Ghandi does not belong to India alone, but to the whole world. The reason for this feeling is, possibly, that Ghandi's vision of, and attitude to, life went beyond national borders. The problems of the struggling world were his own problems. He ranked issues such as the Zulu rebellion and the 1919 Egyptian revolution on the same level as the struggle within his country.

From my childhood I was brought up to respect the Mahatma, as a result of what I always heard from my father and the group of thinkers he belonged to. I remember how I used to go with my father to the meetings of the "Committee of Authorship, Translation and Publishing" with members like Taha Hussein, Ahmed Amin, El-Mazini and other leading Egyptian intellectuals. On more than one occasion I heard lectures about Ghandi and his peaceful resistance. But, since Ghandi was not only a freedom fighter, there were also many discussions about his philosophy and his theories.

I started reading Ghandi's autobiography when I was a student at the university, that is, when my English was developed enough to be able to follow his line of thought. In fact, until now I still keep his autobiography and from time to time I go through it, looking for an opinion, a quotation or an encouragement. What I discovered was that in spite of the Mahatma's strong nationalism, he was not a believer in isolationism. I always quote his famous line saying "let us build our house on strong foundations and open all the windows".

With the present tendency in England and America to publish biographies and autobiographies, one cannot but remember what Ghandi had to say when he was asked by one of his nearest co-workers to write his autobiography. Ghandi agreed to do that, notwithstanding the objections of a "god-fearing friend", as Ghandi writes. The argument of his friend was that writing an autobiography was a practice peculiar to the West. He also warned Ghandi that "supposing you reject tomorrow the things you hold as principles today, or suppose you revise in the future your plans of today, is it not likely that the men who shape their conduct on the authority of your words, spoken or written, may be misled?"

Ghandi admits that the argument had some effect on him, but as he writes, "it is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography. I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and as my life consists of nothing but those experiments it is true that the story will take the shape of an autobiography."

What Ghandi writes about are his experiments in the spiritual field "which are known only to myself, and from which I have derived such power as I possess for working in the political field. If the experiments are really spiritual, then there can be no room for self-praise. They can only add to my humility. The more I reflect and look back on the past, the more vividly do I feel my limitations."

Ghandi was born 126 years ago in October and his country celebrated that occasion. Ghandi will always be remembered wherever the struggle of the people is mentioned. He was a leader who should be paid homage, not only by his own people, but by humanity at large.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Who read what?

Hala Halim canvasses opinions on the best books of 1996

• Mustafa El-Ahmedi, professor of Graeco-Roman history: Euphrosyne Dorion's *The Mysterious Fayoum Portraits: Faces From Ancient Egypt*, a revised edition of which was published this year, is lavishly illustrated. With a foreword by eminent Hellenistic scholar Dorothy Thompson, the book expertly examines the portraits, techniques and artistic value of the mummy portraits. Dorion also shows the portraits to be a prototype of early Byzantine iconography.

• Radwa Ashour, novelist and professor of English literature: The most enjoyable read of the year was Umberto Eco's *The Island of the Day Before*. I read the second edition of Hassan Abbas' work *Al-Nagm Al-Adabi* (Arab Literary Canon), which thoroughly enjoyed Mohamed El-Bisatie's *Sa'at Maghrib* (Hour of Sunset) and found Miral El-Tahawi's *Al-Khaba* (Hiding) beautiful.

• Mariam Barghout, poet: The best poetry collections I read this year were *People on a Bridge* and the *Selected Poems of Wiswasa Saymura* by the 1996 Polish Nobel laureate. Her poetry is so bewitching, I can read nothing else alongside it. In the field of literary criticism, I read with interest Theodore Ziolkowski's *Abbas Al-Riqaya* (Dimensions of the Novel), translated into Arabic by Isam and Bakr Abbas. I also enjoyed Hassan Abbas' autobiography *Glaurat Al-Ra'at* (A Shepherd's Alienation) in which he tells, with an en-

chanting simplicity, of his childhood in Palestine, his years as an undergraduate at Cairo University and his subsequent experiences in the Sudan and Lebanon.

• Sayed El-Bahrawi, critic and professor of Arabic literature: The best political book of the year is the Arabic version of Mohamed Hassanin Heikal's *Secret Channels, Al-Majawad Al-Siriyi*. The best novel is Hosni Hassan's *Jan Akhar Lil-Zill* (Another Name for Shadow). The best collection of short stories is Mohamed El-Bisatie's *Sa'at Maghrib*.

• Mohamed El-Bisatie, novelist: The most beautiful novel I read this year was Patrick Zech's *Kind's Al-Ya* (The Peacock), translated into Arabic by Nabil El-Hafifi. Enad Alm Saleh's *Kalb Yambah Liyaqat Al-Wag* (A Dog that Barks to Pass Time) and Ibrahim Daoud's *Al-Shitaa Al-Qadim* (The Coming Winter) were fine poetry collections. The best works of literary criticism were Sabah Hafez' *Ugh Al-Khatib Al-Naghi* (Histories of Critical Discourse) and Farouq Abdel-Qadir's *Nafay Ma'ina Wa Masabih Qallila* (A Dim Tunnel and Few Lamps). The Arabic version of Hassanin Heikal's *Secret Channels* was also very interesting.

• Salah Fadl, professor of Arabic literature: My choice of best novel of the year would be Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's *La Ahad Yanam Fil-Iskandarriyya* (No one Sleeps In Alexandria). As for the best collection of

short stories, it's Gernot El-Ghitan's *Shayf El-Narr* (Rising Fire). The best collection of poems is Mohamed Ibrahim Abu Sima's *Ward Al-Fusul Al-Akhira* (Flowers of Late Seasons). As for criticism, I think my book *Asalib Al-Shi'riyya Al-Muassira* (Contemporary Methods in Poetry), is good.

• Hassan El-Fidawi, caricaturist: A fascinating book was Shawkat Galal's translation of GM James' *Al-Turath Al-Masrouq*, *Al-Falsafa Al-Younania Falsafa Misriyya Masrouqa* (The Stolen Legacy). Revisionist and persuasively argued.

• Azza Kararrah, professor of English literature: After having read Abdaf Soufi's novel *In the Eye of the Sun*, I read with interest his most recent collection of short stories, *Sand Piper*, which is very much a continuation of her previous work.

• Samia Mehrez, professor of Arabic literature: Two noteworthy works of fiction that have come out this year are Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's *La Ahad Yanam Fil-Iskandarriyya* and Miral El-Tahawi's *Al-Khaba*.

• Hassan Mijoudshi, publisher: Mohamed El-Bisatie's *Sa'at Maghrib* was fascinating; the stories are very compact and well-wrought. Nagwa Barakat's novel *Assa'at Al-Awadiin* (A Bus for Good People), which charts the group dynamics of 13 people who find a corpse on the roof of a bus in an unnamed Arab country, is highly accomplished. A play I enjoyed thoroughly

was Saadallah Wannous' *Tuqous Wo Isharat Al-Tahawul* (Rituals and Signs of Metamorphosis), which takes as its theme democracy and corruption.

• Fatma Moussa, professor of English literature: The play *Papers of 1882*, mainly about Abdullah El-Nadim and written by a group of four people, directed by Roger Assaf, was longish but good. The recent collection of short stories by the Moroccan Rabi'a Raihan is also noteworthy. And this month a translation of a selection of short stories by (Moussa's) daughter, Abdaf Soufi was published under the title *Zinat Al-Haya* (Ornament of Life).

• Tidal Othman, novelist: The two best novels of the year are Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's *La Ahad Yanam Fil-Iskandarriyya* and Miral El-Tahawi's *Al-Khaba*. The former portrays the city during World War II. As for El-Tahawi, her first novel portraying Bedouin life reveals true talent. Mohamed El-Bisatie's short story collection *Sa'at Maghrib* shows him at the peak of his powers, capturing fleeting instances in eloquent, tightly structured tales. In the field of literary criticism, I would cite *Lafifa El-Zayyat*: *Al-Adab Wal-Hayat* (Lafila El-Zayyat: Literature and the Homeland), a volume of essays on the literary works of and public issues championed by El-Zayyat. Farouq Abdel-Qadir's *Nafay Ma'ina Wa Masabih Qallila* presents a panorama of contemporary Egyptian literature,

observed by a rigorous critic.

• Ali El-Ra'i, literary critic: The Supreme Council of Arts and Culture launched several valuable publications this year, among them the works of the Andalusian composer of zagal (poems in the vernacular) Ibn Quzman and Ibrahim Naguib's collected poems. During the recent commemorative celebrations of Mohamed Hussein Heikal, the Supreme Council also reprinted early issues of *Al-Siyassa* which he edited.

• Abdel-Moneim Ramadan, poet: My choice of best novel of the year is Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's *La Ahad Yanam Fil-Iskandarriyya*. Tribute is also due to Maher Sharif Farid for his translation of TS Eliot's complete poems, with the exception of the *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. One should also laud the Egyptian Organisation for Cultural Palaces for their cheap re-edition of the trusies of Ikhwani Al-Safa.

• Amna Rashid, critic and professor of French literature: I very much enjoyed Mohamed El-Bisatie's style and penetrating vision of village life in his collection of short stories *Sa'at Maghrib*. In Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's *La Ahad Yanam Fil-Iskandarriyya*, there was pleasure one gets from reading novels very much imbued with history. The Arabic translation of selected short stories by Abdou Soufi, *Zinat Al-Haya*, showed sensitivity, precision and intelligence. This year I found myself turning to biographies,

among them Jean-Yves Turtie's life of Proust.

• Adel El-Sawi, artist: The Arabic translation of Milan Kundera's *Slowness, Al-Bata'i*, was fascinating. I also read the Italian translation of Brazilian novelist Checcoello's *L'Alchimista* (The Alchemist) which has also been translated into Arabic by Bahaa Tamer. The novel confirmed my impression that South American writers do look to the east, rather than the west, for inspiration. *L'Alchimista* is also deliciously rich in fantasy — something we miss in our writers whose imaginations have been shackled by realism. An excellent poetry collection was Ibrahim Daoud's *Al-Shitaa Al-Qadim*.

• Bahaa Tamer, novelist: This year's finest works of fiction are Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's *La Ahad Yanam Fil-Iskandarriyya*, Miral El-Tahawi's *Al-Khaba* and Mohamed El-Bisatie's *Sa'at Maghrib*. Fathi Faraghi's *Al-Zazana* (The Prison Cell), which narrates his prison experience, was also interesting. An important collection of critical essays is Farouq Abdel-Qadir's *Nafay Ma'ina Wa Masabih Qallila*.

• Wagih Walaha, artist: The best collection of poems was *Shubhat Qadim* (An Old Window), by Ibrahim Al-Badawi. The best novel of the year was *La Ahad Yanam Fil-Iskandarriyya*. Sayed El-Qimani's *Haroub Dawlat Al-Rassoul* (Wars of the Prophet's State) bears witness to the author's rational approach to history.

January 96

Dear diary,
I want to die. I gained three kilos during the Luxor trip. I told Zizo we should have gone to London. I never gain any weight there. One walks so much while shopping. But he said he was too busy to take a whole month of holidays. I bet it is because Bilo and Noussa did not want to go to London. Bilo says the hotel is too expensive. Why doesn't he buy a flat like everybody? Then he would not have to pay hotel bills.

Anyway we went to stupid Luxor instead and all we did was sit around the pool and eat. I never left the hotel and we were in bed by tea. What a holiday! And now these three kilos.

Ramadan is coming soon and that means at least another two kilos. Zizo says that we do not give enough *iftars* and if we don't invite more people this year, we will not be asked as often, but what can I do? If I wake up before four o'clock, I get this terrible migraine and if I don't supervise the kitchen *Usta Abdou* will have his way and make a mess of things. I can't trust anybody to do things properly here. Zizo forgets that I do not have two Filipinos like Mimi and Soussi. They can invite everyone to *iftar* every night of the month if they feel like it. The girls do everything. Soussi was telling me that they even arrange the flowers. I would like to see *Umm Gamal* doing the flowers for me. The other day she handed me the blue vase for the roses. She cannot understand that I can't put gladioli in it and always put the roses in the silver bucket!

Seriously, what am I going to do with these three kilos? I should look into liposuction. Maybe I can do it before the wedding. Really! Gigi had to go and choose the first day of the *Eid* for her son's wedding! I bet she did it because she knows how terrible we all look after Ramadan! And Noha said that my dress may not be ready because her girls at the atelier work short hours during Ramadan. She should change them, or have different ones to work a night shift, that is what I say. I can't see why they should work any less because they are fasting. I want to wear this dress for the wedding and I will, unless Noha is prepared not to ever see me again. I made all my friends order their dresses from her shop and now she seems to have no time for me.

How am I going to lose the three kilos? Loulou said that liposuction hurts and you can't walk for several days afterwards. Nima has a kind of hole in one of her thighs, I noticed. I'm sure she has had liposuction. She eats like a horse, twice as much as I, and last summer in Agami her thighs looked positively skinny. She must have done it just before coming to Agami. I bet that is what she did. Why else would she have a hole?

Roussou says that *exorcism* works but this takes too long. I have to be able to wear the dress. I told Noha to make it quite tight because I was going on a diet. I did very well the first two days but Zizo had to spoil it by insisting that we go to Luxor! He must think we are tourists or something. People come from all over the world to visit Luxor, he said. I wonder why. Maybe it is because they don't have dust and old stones in their own countries. We do. Why, we have dust and old stones on our own street. Anyway, all Zizo did was sit beside the pool and read the papers and play *tavla*. He could have spent the week in a hotel in Cairo and I would not have put weight on.

Dear diary,
Life is not worth living. I feel one of my terrible migraines coming on and I have to pick up my blue suit at The Magasin. If I don't I won't have anything to wear tonight.

Dear diary,
What an evening! I almost lost my mind, can you imagine. As we were leaving, I handed the ticket to the woman at the *vestiaire* and she handed me this horrible rabbit fur. The check of the woman! She was insisting that the numbers matched. I told her that my maid would not wear a coat like this. If Sadi had not come up at that very moment and claimed it, I don't know what would have happened. I was telling Zizo we should call the police when Sadi arrived and told the woman it was her coat. I hope she did not hear the bit about the maid. I'll invite her next week. If she comes it will mean she didn't hear. On second thoughts, maybe I will not invite her. I am not too happy about knowing someone with such a coat. I wonder where she got it. Lila was telling 'em that some of her friends buy second-hand clothes in special shops in London.

Quelle horreur!
I called Mimi and Zizo and told them about the coat. Zizo said it is quite possible, because Gigi buys cheap clothes in London. She may have given Sadi the address. Zizo says Gigi's husband is in trouble. His partner has gone off with most of the money or something. It serves her right for marrying this idiot. And now their son is getting married and of course they want a big wedding so that people stop saying that Mami is in trouble. Maybe they will sell their house in Laguna. I'll tell Zizo to make Mami an offer. If he is really squeezed, Zizo can have it at a good price.

Dear diary
Zizo does not want to buy Mami's house. He says

A year in the life

The best of times, the worst of times. A year of turmoil and change, earthquakes and floods. Stumbling upon a forgotten diary, where grains of sand from August's exertions still nestle between the pages. Fayza Hassan discovers that 1996 was harder for some than for others



that he has put all his money into Tamiya Heights. The house we are planning there will look nice, I must say. I rather like the idea of the Chinese pagoda. I bet all the others will copy us, but I want everyone to know that we were the first to think about it. I called Cici and told her I want her to decorate it. I would not have anyone else. She said it would be cheaper in the long run if she goes to China to pick up the furniture. I think she is right. I am tired of all this Louis XVI furniture that we see everywhere. Of course I'll tell Zizo that Mami is getting all his furniture from England for his cottage. But this is so common.

Cici was saying that she could pick up some hand-painted panelling for the dining room if she goes. She says that we will recoup the price of her ticket by buying these panels, and the transport will cost next to nothing. Cici said we will have the most magnificent house in Tamiya for a bargain. Still it would have been nice to buy the house in Laguna as well. Dida has a house in Laguna and another one in Sarma and they have just bought land in Baha Ali. She says that Bilo likes to invest in real estate. One can't go wrong with land, she was telling me.

I think I should have a serious discussion with Zizo. Women are often better at handling money than men and I really think that we should make Mami an offer.

Dear diary,
That woman Fifi is so strange. I wonder why Didi invited her to the lunch. She kept talking about this man that they divorced forcibly from his wife. I bet she made the whole story up to make us feel that she is clever. No one was speaking to her. She does not belong to the group. Anyway, Zizo would never let anyone divorce him by force. Besides, he is not in politics.

February 1996

Dear diary,
I am going to see Jojo today. He makes you lose weight through meditation. I can't imagine why I put weight on. I hardly eat. During the whole month of Ramadan all I could eat was *kunafa*. Noha said that *kunafa* is fattening. Even Naza has put weight on. I will have to warn her. Hishy looked at her in a funny way yesterday, when she came in wearing her cycling shorts, I noticed. These two must get married soon.

I don't know why Hishy is fussing so much about the flat. He was saying that they might have to forget about Cici. He said that Naza should take care of the decoration herself if she wants to get married in May. I bet his mother is behind the whole thing. I am glad Naza has put her foot down. She wants Cici to do the house and that is that, she told him. It is so much better when young people start the right way. Naza understands that she has to guide Hishy from the beginning.

I wish I had been as wise when I married. In my days parents decided everything between them and we had no say. Well at least my daughter is luckier and the quicker she teaches her future husband to accept responsibilities, the better it is going to be for him.

And when Mo starts thinking about marriage I will talk to his fiancée myself. I don't want him to get stuck with one of those spoiled, good-for-nothing, demanding girls, who want to be pampered and lie in bed with headaches all day long.

Gigi's son married a girl like that. Her father is awfully rich, though. Gigi is not stupid and with Mami and his problems, she is lucky that the girl accepted to go ahead with the wedding. I bet she does not know that her father-in-law is bankrupt.

The wedding was so awful. They were obviously showing off. Mami told Zizo that the *koshra* had cost him 17,000 pounds. How vulgar. I don't know why Zizo even speaks to him now that he is bankrupt. Gigi is holding up, pretending that everything is fine.

Mami says he does not want to sell the house in Laguna. He says he has no reason to. Well, we shall see; and when he comes around, Zizo will pick up the house for a bargain, I will see to that. No reason to sell the house! Really! Everyone knows that he is in trouble! I wouldn't mind spending this summer in Laguna...

March 1996

Dear diary,
Wasn't nice to watch all these heads of state coming to Sharm? I told the children they should stay home and watch because it is history. But Naza said she wanted to go to the movies and Mo went to the club. I watched alone and finished the box of chocolates Lulu gave us.

Dear diary,
What a catastrophe. With this mad cow business what am I going to do for next week's dinner? Zizo said that we should stick to lamb. How can I feed 12 people on lamb? I told *Usta Abdou* to pick up three legs of lamb and 10 chickens. He thinks that fish would be a good idea. He said that we could have it as well as the lamb and the chicken. I don't know. I hate thinking about menus.

I don't know why Zizo refuses to have catering. Everybody is doing it. It is much more practical. I could find out who does the catering for Roussou. She says it does not cost more than home cooking and everyone loves the food.

Of course cow with the mad cows, one over knows. All these funny diseases that we never used to hear about. I will have to warn the children to check their hamburgers.

Dear diary,
Didn't I say we should not have gone to Luxor? They hijacked a plane leaving Luxor for Cairo. We could easily have been on it. I will never go to Luxor again, I shudder at the thought of what could have happened. Can you imagine! Finding myself in Libya! Zizo has no sense of how to protect his family, really. I will tell Hishy that Naza will not be going to Luxor when they are married. Libya of all places! *Quelle horreur!*

April 1996

Dear diary,
What is the world coming to? There has been this terrible shooting in front of a hotel near the Pyramids. Zizo has forbidden the children to go to the pool in any of the hotels. He told them if they wanted to swim they could go to the club. They never swim at the club. None of their friends do. Zizo called Hishy to tell him that Naza should not go to the pool these days. "We are all in danger," he said.

Dear diary,
Now what? Zizo called to say that there were demonstrations at the university, for something that happened somewhere in Lebanon. He said the children should stay home. He is sending the driver to take me to Sayed's. He wanted me to say home too, but I told him it was absolutely necessary that I do my hair today. Mimi's ladies' luncheon is tomorrow and I have to go to Tunes for the fitting. I rather like the idea of the long cut on the side.

Maybe by next week Jojo's advice will finally

make me lose the three centimetres off my waist. He says I don't concentrate enough. How can I? I have all these worries, how can I concentrate on my breathing? He says Nimi has already lost five kilos. I told him, with me it is stress. When I am stressed out I have to eat.

Dear diary,
I bumped into Nini just now. She looks much younger, I must say. She says it is the meditation with Jojo. Roussou says it is this drug Nini is taking, she calls it her little fountain of youth. Her son sent it to her from the States. It is supposed to work wonders. She says everyone is taking it and soon facelifts will be demodé. Speaking of facelifts, Zizo just had one and not a very good one at that. She looks a little like one of those sweet monkeys at the zoo when one offers them a banana. I have a suspicion she had it done here, although she wants us to believe that she was in London.

Well that's too bad, she can't fool me. I called Kiki and told her, and she said that I was quite right, she had never thought about it, but now that I had told her, she said she saw it clearly. Zizo never went to London. Kiki said we should tell the others. Zizo has always been a big liar, she should not be allowed to get away with it.

May 1996

Dear diary,
I just had a fight with Mo. He insists on going to Giza to watch the Squash Championship. I told him "what is the use of having Orbit if you have to go all the way to these places?" He said he was bored with TV and took the car and left.

Dear diary,
There were elections in Israel. Zizo was explaining why things were going to be worse for the Palestinians. I told him it had always been worse. He told me I did not understand anything.

I do, of course, but I did not want an argument just then. I had more important things on my mind: Kiki told me that Mami approached her about the house in Laguna. He joked that all she needed was a house in Laguna and what would she say if he told her that there was a real bargain coming up? She told him that she was thinking of buying a house in the south of France and left it at that, but she thought she should let me know.

That is why I let Zizo have his say, he will have to do some serious negotiation if he wants this house. Upsetting him at such a delicate moment would have been stupid, the kind of thing Roussou would do. She has no diplomacy. I have to call Cici at once to find out if she is going to be free in the near future. I will have to redecorate completely. Gigi's taste is unspeakable.

June 1996

Dear diary,
I am so busy. I am packing to go to Agami.

July 1996

Dear diary,
I am exhausted. All these fit-for-fat parties. Really, it is too much. I did not have a minute to go to the beach. Zizo insisted that we should have a big luncheon for my birthday. Well, it was a terrible idea. *Usta Abdou* worked for three days, *Umm Gamal* threatened to leave if she did not get more help and we had to send the driver to fetch her daughter from Cairo. I arranged all the flowers and the little nut bowls and we put extra chairs in the garden. It was such hard work that I got

my old backache again.
I don't know where people learn their manners these days. Everybody was late. They hardly said happy birthday to me before they attacked the food, which was quite good I must say. *Usta Abdou* surpassed himself for once. When the cake came, I heard Mimi ask whose birthday it was. Really! She should not expect me to invite her again in a hurry. As soon as they were done with the dessert, they all ran for the door. Merry has a party tonight and they wanted to lie down before going there. Sadi was trying to swallow the last bite as she was saying good-bye. Of course I had to help *Umm Gamal* tidy up and I was too exhausted to go to Merry's. What an awful birthday.

Dear diary,
It is terrible. Two of my bougainvilleas are dying. I called Assem but he does not know what happened. He said he will ask Ashraf who does the plants at the club. Ashraf said we were watering the plants too often. Zizo said that if I want I can get Gerald from Cairo, he is a specialist. I called Roussou, who knows Gerald. She called me back to tell me that Gerald would come on the weekend but we have to send him the driver. I am afraid to tell Zizo how much he is charging. Still, I am glad he is coming. I will ask him to check the other plants.

Dear diary,
Gerald came. He hardly looked at my plants and he knew what the trouble was. I was buying cheap plants. He said the best thing was to do the garden over. He is sending someone to do the job. He will come with a truck which is bringing the hundred plants I ordered from Gerald.

Zizo made a scene but I pointed out that calling Gerald was his idea in the first place and that new plants would be a good investment in the long run. He was not convinced but when Mimi heard that Gerald was doing our garden over, he said he would call Gerald and tell him to do his garden too. After Mimi's visit, Zizo was no longer upset about paying all this money to Gerald.

August 1996

Dear diary,
Zizo went to Cairo to see about the new private university for Mo. I am going to have a ladies' luncheon. I am ordering everything. The others do it all the time. Besides, Zizo saved on not going to London this winter.

September 1996

Dear diary,
Gerald sent two men with the plants. They said that if I really wanted something nice I should think of having a pergola. Mami said that she could take me to a woman who does pottery just for pergolas. She says that her pots will give a unique cachet to the garden. We are going tomorrow.

Dear diary,
I have to pack, we are going back to Cairo. Roussou's daughter is getting married and I have to order my dress before the others come running to Tunes.

Beeba told me that there is a shop in Cairo which sells French haute couture. It is a bit fishy but apparently if you really want something special without going to France, this is the place to go. I'll see, maybe I can find something there for the New Year as well. Everyone is buying their dresses at Tunes. It is becoming a little boring really.

October 1996

Dear diary,
How terrible. This house that collapsed in Heliopolis. And it wasn't even a cheap house. There were people like us living there. Zizo is calling an engineer to check the foundations. I told him he should also check the foundations in Tamiya Heights. Zizo said he has not started building there yet but one can never be too careful, I told him. Maybe he should get someone from abroad to build the house.

I don't feel safe here anymore. I told Mo to forget about the New Year party here. I don't want all these people rocking the foundations. He can go out with his friends.

November 1996

Dear diary,
I must rush, Zizo has closed the deal with Mami and I am having the biggest party ever to celebrate.

December 1996

Dear diary
I think that this is the last time I write this year. Zizo said we have to spend Christmas in London because Mimi and Soussi are going. I will be busy shopping for our new house in Laguna. Cici said that English furniture is the right style for Laguna. Zizo has asked her to come along.

Love and kisses, Ninette

Sufra Dayma

Samani date jam

Ingredients:
2kg Samani dates
1kg sugar
100 grs clove
Rind of 2 mandarines
1/2 cup fresh lemon juice
Water

Method:
Pick up very hard dates with no blemishes or ripeness. Rinse them with water and put aside. Prepare a large cooking pan filled with three litres of tap water, add in half the quantity of lemon juice, the mandarin rind and the clove divided into two quantities, each wrapped into a piece of pharmaceutical muslin cloth, tightly tied and knotted, then put into the water. Start peeling the dates and placing them one by one into the water. Keep the peeled-off skin of the dates in another pan, cover it with water and boil it until it reduces. Leave the dates soaked in their water. Boil the dates in the other pan until they turn crimson and become tender. If they need more water while boiling, add the skins juice after straining it and discarding the skins. Leave the dates to cool then remove the stones by pushing them out from one end to the other. Now add the sugar to the water and bring to a boil. Stir less the sugar sticks to the bottom and leave to simmer over low heat until this syrup becomes sticky. Add the stone-free dates and cook over low heat until they become jammy and glazed with syrup. Add the remaining lemon juice, stir it in and allow to cook for ten more minutes. Remove from heat and leave to cool. When the jam is still warm, pour it into clean and dry jars, pressing on the top to release gas bubbles. Close the jars tightly when they cool to room temperature and place in the refrigerator.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Where the fishes swim

Nigel Ryan on a less than Homeric simplicity

It was something of an accident that I happened to find myself in El Greco last week. It is located in that grey area beyond the Shooting Club where Mo-hamaddin at some point becomes Dokki and any number of new restaurants appear to be sprouting.

El Greco is a far more traditional establishment than its trendier neighbours on Midan Amman. An almost discreet entrance, bordered by columns opens onto a large and airy dining room with well-spaced tables and large, comfortable chairs. Everything is coordinated. The tablecloths are white and blue, the china white and blue, the panes of glass in the windows blue, casting a turquoise glow over the white walls on which are hung blue paintings. There is one oddity in this interior, a trench-like channel that skirts the tables and contains large carp swimming beneath plates of glass that the waiters swear will support the weight of even this restaurant reviewer. Not one to take chances, I jumped across the stream when over necessary. Perhaps there is a second oddity too. Parts of the white plastered walls have been chipped away to reveal ersatz cobbling.

The more perceptive readers of this column — there are, incidentally, many faux columns in the interior — may already have guessed that El Greco specialises in Greek food. Indeed, the majority of items on the menu are listed as Greek specialties. And it was from these portions of the blue and white menu that we dutifully ordered: *thalassina frouda*, *spanako tiropita*, *kotopoulo lemonata* and *kleftiko*.

Thalassina frouda comprised prawns and calamari in a very pleasant dressing made from good olive oil and lemon juice. The *spanako tiropita*, described on the menu as spinach pie, was actually a plate of filo pastry triangles stuffed with a mixture of spinach and feta cheese.

I have only ever eaten *kleftiko* served on the bone and so was surprised to find a plate of sliced lamb in a slightly reduced broth. I had been asked how I wanted the lamb and it arrived, as requested, medium rare, so I should perhaps not have been so surprised at its sliced state. It proved, in any case, a far more successful choice than the *kotopoulo lemonata*, chicken in a much too acidic lemon sauce. Both these dishes arrived accompanied by a very un-Grecian mound of curried rice mixed with peas, and a variety of faintly *ad dente* vegetables.

The service was good, as was most of the food. The bread accompanying the first course was brown, fresh and served with small tubs of garlic butter. Nor is El Greco particularly expensive. Lunch for two, including mineral water and coffee was less than £10. A great deal of pepper in a variety of blue and white china items — came to under £95.

The Greek music piped into the restaurant could perhaps have encouraged a larger party, who had indulged in something stronger than mineral water, to place an order for the "special plates for breaking". It was enjoyable enough, however, without the sound of breaking china.

El Greco, Midan Amman, Dokki.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

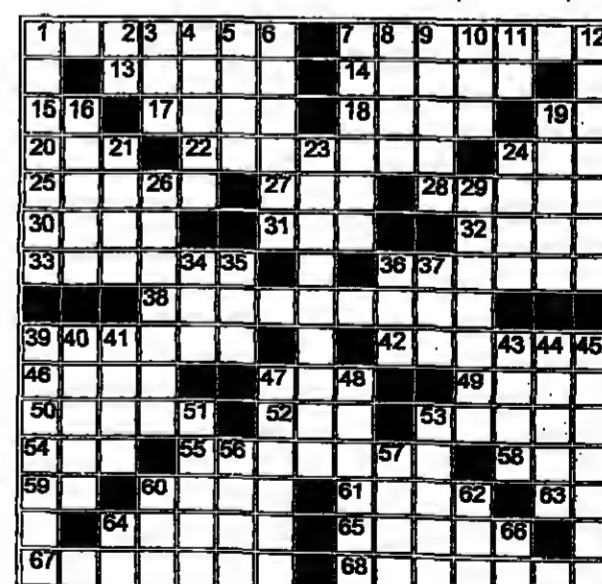
By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS

1. Superintendent [7]
7. Carnal [7]
13. Conscious [5]
14. Touches up text [5]
15. Symbol for sodium [2]
17. Humoral [5]
18. Double-dare [5]
19. Initials of very high government officer [2]
20. Literary gossip [3]
22. Present time [7]
24. French law [3]
25. Place where insect deposits eggs [5]
27. Crumbs [3]
28. Leaven [5]
30. Plaster, cent or penny [5]
31. Born [3]
32. Domed-roof in church [5]
33. All inclusive [6]
36. Impressed on; inscribed [6]

DOWN

1. Money management [7]
2. Ancient Egyptian sun-god [2]
3. Lamb's horn [3]
4. Song-thrush [5]
5. Related [4]
6. Hero of Trafalgar [6]
7. Self-possessed; unexcitable [6]
8. Paradise [4]
9. Stylish, al [5]
10. Filthy abode [3]
11. We [2]
12. Restricted, girded [7]
16. Negative charged ion [5]
19. Lynch mob [5]
21. Mine entrance [4]
23. Manipulation [9]
24. A nomadic race of northern Scandinavia [4]
26. Consistent; invariable [7]
29. Committed; fervent [7]
34. Free [3]
35. Poetic for 'before' [3]
36. A garden chore [3]
37. Limb [3]
39. Var. of 'damsel' [7]
40. Glorify [5]
41. Combine; interweave [7]



42. Chamber [4]
44. Fruit of cereal [5]
45. Mediterranean winds blowing in summer [7]
47. Prayer beads [6]
48. Trader [6]
51. Dressing; impertinent speech; cooking liquid [5]
53. Nose [5]
56. Grain husks [4]
57. Jot [4]
60. US Soc. of Comp. abb. [3]
62. Equipment [3]
64. Either's partner [2]
66. Weather directions [2]

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

161

An agrarian exhibition in Cairo in 1899 gave birth to the establishment of a national society to help farmers and develop agriculture in the country. The new body, sponsored by the khedive and supported by the government, British occupation authorities and big and small landowners alike, was called the Royal Agricultural Society. The society lives on today under the same name, except for the 'Royal' epithet, dropped after the 1952 Revolution that overthrew the monarchy. The story of the society's early days was told in numerous reports published by *Al-Ahram*. Dr Yuman Labib Rizk sums it up in this instalment of his *Diwan* series



Few national institutions received the support given to the Royal Agricultural Society at the beginning of this century. It was backed by the British occupation which had always wanted to convert Egyptian agriculture into a source of raw cotton for British textile factories; by the major landowners, foremost among them the incumbent on the khedival throne, who perceived the society as promoting their economic interests; and by the middle landowners who also quickly realised the benefits the society would bring to them.

British concern for the project was reflected in the increasing space allotted to it in Lord Cromer's annual report on 'Finance, Administration and the General State of Egypt', particularly as of 1904. In his report of that year, the British High Commissioner expressed his appreciation of the contributions the society was making to developing the traditional methods of agriculture in the country. Responding to the allegations levelled against Egyptian farmers that they were 'conservative' and unwilling to entertain new concepts of farming, he argued that this was a trait common to farmers around the world, not just to Egyptians. He then discussed the ideas that were being put forward about the best means to develop Egyptian agriculture.

One suggestion, the establishment of a Ministry of Agriculture, he did not rule out outright. Nevertheless, he argued that, while such a ministry may be desirable for the future, at present there was a strong need that resisted the ubiquitous intervention of the state and opposed dependence upon the government in every matter. He recognised that there was a need for community work to receive a strong impetus through government backing; but the Royal Agricultural Society established five years previously was fulfilling this purpose.

The support the society received from major landholders was apparent from its initial membership, which consisted of Egyptians, foreigners, absentee landlords of Turkish aristocratic origins and absentee landlords of purely Egyptian origins who had inherited their holdings from ancestors who had performed various government functions in the

countryside. The names of the occupants of the key positions in the society when it was founded illustrates the class configuration of its membership. Its first chairman was the khedive's uncle, Prince Hussein Kamel, who assumed the throne following the declaration of the British protectorate over Egypt in 1914. His vice-chairman was Prince Ibrahim Hilmi and the secretary was one of the more senior British government officials, Mr Fowden.

Mid-level landowners at first were reluctant to join the society. However, once they perceived the potential membership in it would offer and once the membership fees were reduced from LE 5 to LE 1 in 1904, they began to join en masse. Within the following year, the membership of the society jumped from 243 to 3131, giving the mid-level landowners a 15 to 1 edge in representation.

It is commonly believed that the society was founded in 1898. However, *Al-Ahram*'s edition of 22 April of the following year provides us with its true birth certificate. The newspaper announced that an agricultural exhibit that was being held at that time was a propitious moment to establish an agricultural association. Six days previously, it told us, the exhibition committee, 'chaired by His Highness Prince Hussein Pasha Kamel', decided to establish an agricultural society. The proposal was welcomed by the khedive who offered to take the society under his royal sponsorship. At its initial membership, it consisted of 52 members of the royal family, ministers, international consuls, officials in the government and the occupation army, bank presidents and commercial interests. The purpose of the society was 'to improve the cultivation of flowers, trees, fruits and grains and to establish an agricultural fair in which prizes are offered'.

It is useful to mention that Prince Hussein Kamel was not selected as the new society's first chairman solely because he was the khedive's uncle or that he had been the chairman of the agricultural exhibition held that year. It was also because his horticultural interests were well known. We learn from *Al-*

Ahram that Sir Reginald Wingate, who had just been appointed governor-general of Sudan at the time of the founding of the society, had asked Prince Hussein 'for a selection of plants and shoots from his garden in Giza so that Wingate may transport them to gardens in Khartoum. The prince gave instructions to send to Sudan a sampling of 6,000 seedlings from every type of plant he had'.

Four months after it was established, the founders of the Royal Agricultural Society announced the charter of their organisation. The aims of the society contained in the charter were essentially the same as those announced upon its formation, with the additional aim of establishing agricultural banks. The major portion of the charter, however, was devoted to the structural organisation of the society. It was to have an executive committee consisting of 30 members, elected by the general assembly for a three-year term. The committee would meet at least three times a year, 'in order to organise the agricultural exhibitions and the prizes and rewards'.

An agricultural fair was held from 24-28 January 1901, and was thought to be an excellent occasion for holding the society's first general assembly meeting in the exhibition pavilion in Gezira.

All indications suggest that the objectives of the January 1901 meeting were accomplished. It expanded its scope of activity by taking over the statistics section of the Ministry of Finance, 'in order to record the numbers of plants, livestock, revenues and finances'. The society was also granted 120 faddans of land in Giza and 200 faddans in Mit El-Diba to be allocated for experimental farming to test different plant strains, methods for combating agricultural pests and artificial fertilisers, or 'chemical manure' as *Al-Ahram* called it.

Before the 1901 general assembly adjourned that year, the allocation of prizes in the fair would provide the occasion for the society to declare its particular areas of interest. Prizes for the best cotton produce ranked the highest, followed by prizes for grains (wheat, barley, millet, corn, rice, lentils, sesame, chickpeas, etc.), as well as for the best tomato and sweet potato crops. Livestock

had its separate set of prizes for the various categories of local breeds, foreign breeds, animals fattened for slaughter, as well as sheep, goats, donkeys and mules.

Evidently the success of this fair induced the society not to restrict such events to Cairo alone, but rather to hold them on a rotating basis in the capital cities of all the provinces.

The general assembly meeting of 3 April 1901 passed several resolutions that indicate the direction of the expansion planned by the society. *Al-Ahram* quotes from the minutes of that meeting:

'This society has resolved: firstly, to create a permanent committee, to be chaired by Prince Hussein Kamel Pasha; secondly, to build a storehouse for the best types of fertilisers; thirdly, to improve the breeding of cows and bulls.'

As we follow the development of these projects in *Al-Ahram*, we learn that on 9 May 1901, that the society, 'after examining 30 samples of fertilisers imported from European factories, has decided to purchase fertiliser from the French factories in view of the 30 per cent lower price, its finer quality and its suitability to Egyptian soil. The society will purchase the fertiliser and resell it to Egyptian farmers at cost price for no profit. An agency will be established in Alexandria to distribute the fertilisers to the land owners.' At the same time, the society distributed a questionnaire to its members in order to ascertain the quantities of fertiliser they would consider purchasing. In addition, after the Railway Authority had announced that it would raise the freight costs for fertilisers as of the following year, the society negotiated with it to maintain the transportation costs at their current prices.

Any innovation has its proponents and detractors, and this new project was no different. On 12 June 1901, one contributor to *Al-Ahram* expressed a cogent argument under the heading 'Objections to using chemical fertilisers.' The author cautioned: 'Such fertilisers are harmful to the soil. They stick to the ground like glue, for if the land is irrigated, the topsoil erodes and these artificial substances, with all the salts they contain, remain, bringing a halt to growth and rendering ploughing and tilling difficult.'

Another serious objection came from the merchants trading in locally produced fertilisers, who feared that the imported fertilisers would jeopardise their commerce. It appears, however, that many farmers were indifferent to their plea and the demand for the new fertilisers grew, as later reports on the Royal Agricultural Society suggest. One report announced that the society would not restrict its distribution of the chemical fertilisers to its members, but would extend it to small farmers and that 'the National Bank has agreed to forward the funds for its distribution and to take the costs in instalments.' A second item reports that the demand for the new fertilisers had become so great that the society's stocks were depleted. The society, obliged to refund many subscribers to the tune of LE10,000, 'commissioned Mr Fowden to travel to France in order to negotiate an order for a large quantity of this brand of fertiliser, costing a total of LE30,000. The society will construct a warehouse in Alexandria to store the anticipated quantity.' In spite of this setback, Royal Agricultural Society officials continued to promote the product, as we note from the following advertisement in *Al-Ahram* of 10 November, 1904: 'We have received a large quantity of nitrate fertilisers which all unanimously agree is particularly beneficial to winter crops.' The advertisement reminded farmers of 'the importance of chemical fertilisers in these days of agricultural expansion.' It also reminded them of the attractive price — 'Only 100 piastres for every faddan of wheat' — and of how easy it was to transport and apply. At the same time, it stressed that the Society 'gains no material profit whatsoever from this fertiliser; rather, its only desire is to aid farmers and to serve the interests of agriculture in general.'

As for the second project on the society's agenda, cattle breeding, it was decided that the heads of the provincial directorates would be commissioned to 'collect the fees from country notables who express an interest in obtaining the stud bulls.' In the area of select seeds and pesticides, the government allocated 250 faddans of government land for the society to conduct experiments on two strains of cotton. After having obtained an LE30,000 loan from the government, the society also created a tightly organised programme for the distribution of the seeds it purchased, distributing notices to provincial directorates 'clarifying the procedures to follow for ordering seeds.'

As for pesticides, *Al-Ahram* announced that the society had 'imported an insect, discovered by some American scientists, which exterminates the cotton worm and which the society has sown in the Egyptian soil in order to safeguard the cotton plants.' Unfortunately, the endeavour failed, as the Egyptian cotton worm was of a different variety to the American one.

Towards the end of 1904, the general assembly met again with the aim of discussing ways to extend their activities throughout the provinces in light of an increase in government subsidies to LE5,000 a year. They decided to delegate a representative of the society to each directorate to advise the branch committees on how best to channel their efforts. Originally, three such representatives were selected, one for Upper Egypt who would be based in Minya, a second for the provinces of Beheira, Gharbiya and Menoufiya, who would be based in Tanta, and the third for Sharqiya, Daqahliya and Qalyubiya to be based in Bahya.

Perhaps this extension of its activities is what caused the Ministry of Public Works to defer the establishment of an agricultural authority under its auspices, since, as *Al-Ahram* reported 'it intends to seek the services of the existing Agricultural Society.' This, to the newspaper, was evidence of the success of the society which had the advantages of being unrestricted by government bureaucracy and a membership consisting of 'officials of state, princes, pashas, major landowners, mayors and numerous people of experience and expertise.'

The author is a professor of history and head of *Al-Ahram* History Studies Centre.

Delegation to Saudi Arabia

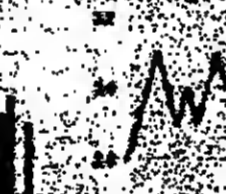
ATEF Obaid, minister of the public business sector who headed an Egyptian delegation to Saudi Arabia, held an expanded meeting with Saudi businessmen to discuss setting up 45 projects with a capital of LE12 billion. Obaid assured Saudi businessmen that there is no intention to impose restrictions on foreign investments in Egypt.

Prior to this meeting, the ministerial delegation met with the Egyptian community in Saudi Arabia where they made clear that Egyptian competitive industries encourage an atmosphere for investment in Egypt.

Money & Business



Income tax law amended



SNR Co celebrates its golden jubilee



FOR 50 years, the French company SNR has been providing its ball bearing to be used in developing industry as well as land and sea transport, such as aircraft, engines and locomotives. SNR ball bearings are an essential component of Airbus and Boeing 737 aircraft engines and Aron guided missiles. Similarly, SNR's products are the prime component of the Bull locomotive engine, the fastest French locomotive in the world that won a world record for exceeding a

speed of 515 km p/h in May 1990. SNR ball bearings are a main component in equipment used in all kinds of industries, from automotive to construction equipment. Likewise, SNR's products have found their way into such diverse industries like fertiliser, cement, electricity and iron and steel production. These are but some of the many industries which the products SNR have been used.

The International Trade and Investment Company (Mustafa Fawzi and

Co) is the sole agent in the Arab Republic of Egypt for the complete product range of SNR Co, whose excellence was recognised when the company received the ISO 9001 certificate in 1988.

SNR ball bearings from France enjoys the confidence of industrial and technical engineers, who know that these ball bearings provide economic benefits and will last to their maximum life expectancy. It gives up pleasure on this occasion to wish our customers a happy holiday season.

Industrial federation preparing for the future

THE EGYPTIAN Federation of Industries is implementing a strategy aimed at reviving Egyptian industry and developing the volume of exports until they reach a level that will add to the weight of Egypt's political and economic impact in the region.

Mamdouh Thabit Mekki, undersecretary at the federation, emphasised the necessity of reviving Egyptian industry which possesses the qualities suitable to compete in the global arena, with industries such as leather tanning and products, which are in great demand in foreign markets. Egyptian quality and workmanship is also recognised in such industries as furniture making, ready-made clothing, ceramics, carpets, and more. Mekki affirmed the importance of these industries, saying that a suitable environment must be created in order for these industries to thrive and develop. He explained that moving tanneries to New Badr City was a technological and industrial revolution, which will provide job op-

portunities and increase production volume which will be a true addition to the vastness of this industry. Mekki added that the speed in which such quality projects are being implemented will be key in attracting new markets for Egyptian goods.

Mekki explained that the vision of the federation is to provide Egypt with a new generation of small industries and investors. To realise this, he explained, it is absolutely necessary to reduce the amount of tariffs and taxes. 'We are not refusing what the Gannouri government has and is still implementing,' he said. 'Rather, we are trying to remove the routine in order to pave the way for more investors and businessmen to operate in the new cities and elsewhere... the government will examine the obstacles facing industrialists, investors and businessmen and as a result, the forthcoming period will witness important developments in providing greater opportunity for development and investment in Egypt.'

Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt

The Zakat Fund Committee at Faisal Bank announces its four competitions in memorizing and reciting of the Holy Quran

For Egyptian University Graduates the grand prize

- 1- Should be Muslim, learning by heart the Holy Quran, understanding the meanings of the verses
- 2- Age not to exceed 30 years
- 3- The competition will take place Friday March 14, 8 a.m. 1997 in Terat El Gabal St. Zeltoun
- 4- The 1st ten winners will get financial awards

3rd Competition: Learning by heart half of the Holy Quran

- 1- Should be Muslim learning by heart from part 18 to part 30
- 2- Age not to exceed 15 years
- 3- Competition will take place Friday Feb. 14, 8 a.m. 1997
- 4- Financial awards will be granted for 1st ten winners
- 5) 1st winner will get L.E. 500 plus 55 other prizes for winners

2nd competition: Learning by heart and reciting all parts of the Holy Quran

- 1- Should be Muslim, learning the Holy Quran by heart, with ability to recite verses correctly
- 2) Age not to exceed 30 years
- 3) The competition will be at 8 a.m. Friday morning Feb 14, 1997
- 4) L.E. 1000 will be awarded for the 1st winner

4th Competition: Learning by heart quarter of the Holy Quran

- 1- Should be Muslim, memorizing quarter of the Holy Quran
- 2- Age should not exceed 12 years
- 3- Competition will take place Friday Feb 14, 8 a.m. 1997
- 4- 1st five winners will receive financial awards

TERMS:

Applications to be completed at the Bank's branches at least two weeks before the date of the competition in Beah, Tanta, Mahala, Dammanhour, Alexandria, Suez, Mansoura, Assiut, Sohag at the Zakat dept in Terat El Gabal Zeitoun

Final competition will be among winners of the branches. Awards will be delivered in a party to be held at the head office

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History on display

Egyptian museums saw many activities and improvements this year. **Nevine El-Aref** reports

Egyptian Museum

THE INSTALLATION of a high-tech security system, including fixed and mobile cameras linked to a closed-circuit television, has been completed at the Egyptian Museum. The museum, its gardens, roof and the surrounding streets are under close surveillance.

The cameras are operated by guards from a control room in the building's basement. Mohamed Saleh, director of the museum, said that an early-warning system and a burglar alarm have also been installed, and the wooden gates at the entrance have been replaced by iron ones. "After the museum is closed to the public each day, its halls and corridors are patrolled by trained dogs, making it impossible for would-be thieves to remain inside undetected," explained Saleh.

Coptic Museum

THIS YEAR, the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo organised a series of archaeological lectures at the Coptic Culture Centre in the restoration department. The monthly lectures aim to increase archaeological awareness by providing the public with information about new discoveries, restoration projects and conservation.

The museum has also published a new guide, which provides descriptions of its most important displays along with information on Coptic history and the development of the monastic movement. The catalogue contains more than 50 colour photographs of items on display and costs LE 20.

Revolution Museum

DURING the celebrations marking the 54th anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution of July 1952, President Hosni Mubarak announced that the former revolution headquarters on El-Gezira Island would be converted into a museum, featuring photographs and information about the revolution and its free officers.

Conversion and restoration of the palace will be carried out by the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). Structural work, restoration of windows and walls, development of the grounds and renovation of furniture are being given top priority. The 26-room palace will open to the public in 1997.

Arabic Calligraphy Museum

FAROUK Hosni, the minister of culture, put 80 works of Arabic calligraphy on display at the Zeinab Khatoun house in the Al-Azhar area, following their discovery at Wakalet El-Ghuri. This famous Mameluke house has now been converted into an Arabic Calligraphy Museum.

The collection, which contains unique works by celebrated Egyptian and Turkish calligraphers dating to the 16th and 19th centuries, forms the nucleus of the display.

A booklet, which includes information about the exhibits and the study of Arabic calligraphy, is available at the museum.

Centre for Sinai Studies

THIS year the Supreme Council of Antiquities opened the first educational and scientific centre on the history of North Sinai.

"It will make information accessible to scholars as well as the general public," said Mohamed Abdel-Magoud, general director of North Sinai Antiquities. It comprises three buildings: a residential unit for students and lecturers, a library containing more than 20,000 archaeological books and documentary films and a building with both lecture and reception halls. The centre also has a studio where colour slides showing the development of Ancient Egyptian architecture can be viewed.

The centre has a museum of Sinai artifacts, which include pottery of different ages and excavated objects dating to before and after the Israeli occupation.

This centre is the first scientific institution to be established in Sinai.

It is built on 1,500 sq metres and includes architecture inspired by Pharaonic temples.

Graeco-Roman Museum

A PERMANENT exhibition of ancient Alexandria currency, including 200 bronze and silver coins used by Alexandrians in the Roman period, has been established at the Graeco-Roman Museum.

"The coins are unique because they were created for use only in Alexandria," said Samira Abdel-Ra'ouf, curator of the coin department.

The coins portray Alexandrian historical sites like the Qait Bey Citadel and the ancient eastern port. They also reveal the style and shape of Alexandrian buildings of the time.

Special display

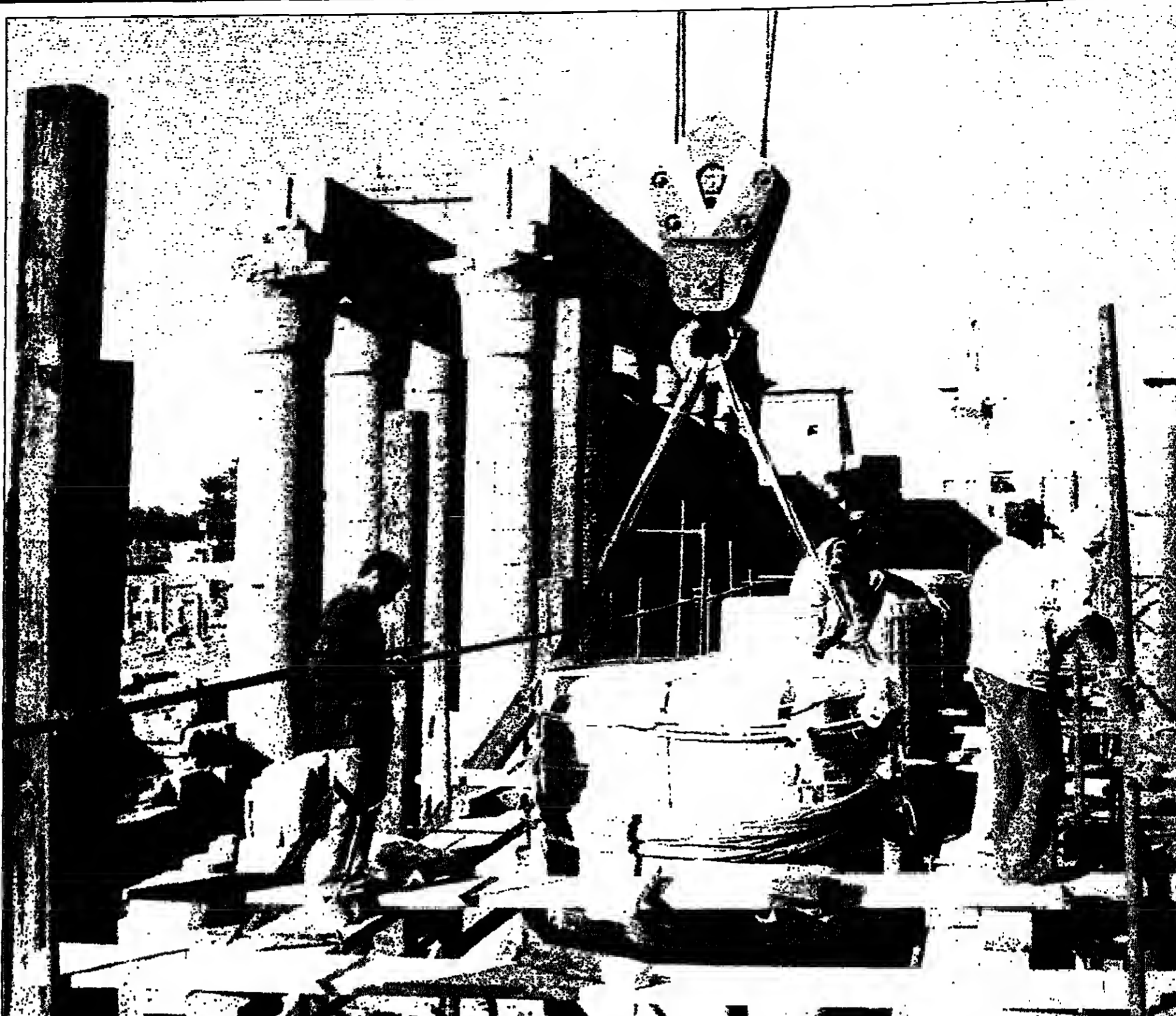
TWO years ago, Cairo Museum started a series of special displays entitled "Masterpiece of the Month." The aim was to highlight some of its lesser known treasures by placing them at the entrance of the museum. Among this year's special displays was a statue of the Greek goddess Aphrodite. It is made of marble and shows the goddess rising from the sea with a dolphin behind her.

"This goddess," said Mohamed Saleh, "was a member of the great council of gods thought to live on Mount Olympus under the leadership of Zeus. She was the goddess of beauty, love and joy but also, in Sparta, the goddess of war. Her cult center in Egypt was at Atfih, south of Cairo."

Restoration

THE FAMOUS copper statues of Pepi I and his son Merneptah are being restored by the German Restoration and Maintenance Centre in collaboration with the Supreme Council of Antiquities. The project aims to save both statues from rust and corrosion by using dry ultrasonic equipment specially designed for cleaning statues without damaging them. They are the oldest surviving metal statues.

They were made partly by casting and partly by hammering the metal over a wooden core and then attaching them together with copper nails. The kilt and the headdress were made separately, probably with plaster, and subsequently gilded.



The columns of Luxor Temple's Solar Court being reconstructed

photos: Sharif Sorbel

Digs '96 — the ups and downs



The Egyptian Museum is now under close surveillance by closed-circuit television

Underwater discoveries off Qait Bey in Alexandria, an attempted theft in Cairo Museum, a change in leadership at the Supreme Council of Antiquities, progress on the Giza Plateau and a USAID grant for restoration are some of 1996's important events, highlighted by **Jill Kamil**

Alexandria has been much in the news this year. No sooner had the colossal statues that were lifted from their watery bed off Qait Bey at the end of 1995 been transported to the archaeological gardens of Kom El-Dikka for treatment and eventual display, than another discovery was made. Marine archaeologists claim that they have rediscovered and mapped the outlines of the sunken quarter of ancient Alexandria.

The new discovery lies, as expected from historical accounts, on the eastern side of Alexandria's Eastern Harbour, within sight of the centre of the modern city. Frank Goddio, president of the European Institute of Marine Archaeology in Paris and director of the project, told a news conference at the beginning of November that "the exact topography of the vanished royal city can be identified for the first time." He added, "We are not finding limestone blocks, but blocks of calcite, basalt, marble and granite — superb construction material of great value."

Meanwhile, the Polish archaeological mission at Kom El-Dikka continues to excavate a Roman residential district next to the late Roman theatre, which served as an odeum. More pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that is ancient Alexandria are falling into place.

"Alexandria has priority," announced Ali Hassan, who unexpectedly took over leadership of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) from Abdel-Halim Nouredin in September. Foreign archaeological missions initially voiced some apprehension following the change in leadership, but they have been assured by the new secretary-general that no changes will be made in existing archaeological teams. Hassan did add, however, that there would be a moratorium on future concessions, and "re-evaluation of some current excavations."

Within a month of his appointment, Hassan suspended the mission led by Liana Souvalzi, a Greek, in Siwa pending "expert assessment of her work." She claimed last year to have discovered the tomb of Alexander the Great, and readers will recall that archaeologists generally regarded her evidence as "flimsy." Much criticism was leveled against the SCA for allowing the excavation to continue as she was not — as stipulated by antiquities law — affiliated with a recognised archaeological institution. Now that the site has been closed, the area will be re-examined and the search for Alexander's tomb will no doubt continue.

The SCA's new secretary-general also put an end to a long-standing problem that has faced El-Moallaka (Hanging) Church in Old Cairo. He announced that "restoration would commence immediately, including installation of the necessary sanitary network, electricity grids and anti-fire and anti-theft alarm systems."

Setting a precedent for the whole of Old Cairo and its many Coptic churches and monasteries, he also announced that entry fees to the church of El-Moallaka would be canceled for both Egyptians and foreigners. "It is primarily a place of worship, not a monument," he said, adding that the SCA would not interfere with the running of the

church, "only in its restoration as an historic landmark."

One of the most extraordinary events in 1996 took place in September, when a thief walked into Cairo Museum in broad daylight, hid beneath a sarcophagus until the doors were locked, spent the night casually selecting 24 objects from the Tutankhamun collection that were not too cumbersome to carry and would have walked out with the 'loot' the following morning had it not been for a wary officer on duty.

The man called Amr Sabri, claimed that it was "easier to rob the museum than a jewellery shop or house." His failed effort served to expose the unsatisfactory nature of security at the museum, and Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni announced the allocation of LE20 million to purchase an up-to-date security system.

Under the slogan "The environmental sustainability of tourism," USAID is now putting aside large sums of money for restoration projects. Under the aegis of the Egyptian-US partnership for economic growth and development, reconstruction will be carried out in several areas, including: the Tomb of Seti I in Luxor, the Islamic fortress at Qusair, the monasteries of Saint Antony and Saint Paul near the Red Sea coast and medieval Islamic monuments in Cairo.

One on-going, successful project that continued to meet all deadlines this year was the Pyramid Plateau Master Plan. The Queens' Tombs at Giza were opened to tourists for the first time in February, including that of Meres-Ankh, one of the queens of Khafre, which is reported to be drawing large crowds. Khafre's Pyramid was open to the public in September, and last month it was announced that the creation of a ring road around Giza Plateau would begin. When completed, the archaeological site will finally be restricted to pedestrians.

Further south, the pyramids of Abusir and Dahshur were opened in September — the latter after being closed for 40 years because of military installations in the area. Not many tourists are travelling to these two sites yet, because, in the words of a travel agent, "they haven't been properly promoted."

Among the charming medieval houses of Cairo that are getting a new lease of life are Beit El-Sehemi, which is being converted into a museum, and the famous Gayer-Anderson Museum which is remaining open to the public while being restored. In Luxor, the lowering of the columns of the Solar Court of Amenhotep III onto their new bases marked the beginning of the last stage of reconstruction.

In rounding off the archaeological highlights of 1996, mention must be made of a number of discoveries: a hawk cemetery in the Delta, an ancient winery at Abu Mina in the ruins of the monastic centre in Maryut near Alexandria, a Pharaonic tomb in Helmet El-Zeitoun, a suburb of Cairo, a ciadel at Quantara Sharq in Sinai and a decorated jewellery box of the Islamic era in Alexandria.

An active year all round.



President Mubarak on one of his trips to the tourist areas

Tourism twists and turns

Non-traditional tourists swarmed to Egypt this year like never before, Rehab Saad discovers

There was a time when tourists fell into a single category — those who came to Egypt to see the Pyramids of Giza and the Valley of the Kings. Now, however, the Egyptian tourist product is so diversified that the Ministry of Tourism is cultivating a wider variety of attractions than ever before.

For example, tourists from the US, Japan, Australia and Canada are in search of historical sites while Europeans and Russians are attracted to water sports and Egypt's expansive beaches, especially in winter. Russian, Japanese, Benelux, Scandinavian and Swiss tourists have increased dramatically, and conference-tourism has created a new and remunerative market.

"People from Japan, the US and Australia have beaches, so their interest in Egypt is as an historical destination," said Sayed Mehrez, general manager of a technical office within the Ministry of Tourism. He explained that there is a trend now to promote Egypt also as a non-seasonal destination, because "our beaches are operational all year round."

Russian and Japanese tourists to Egypt reached a record high in 1996. It was inter-

esting to note that Russians were, for the first time, affluent and discerning visitors who could luxuriate on Nile cruises, and that the Japanese spent large amounts on Egyptian products. "In the past, most Russians were merchants. They came to Egypt to buy and sell. Now we have wealthy tourists from Moscow and St. Petersburg who prefer to go to Hurghada and Luxor and stay in five-star hotels," said Nagwa El-Alfy, a tour operator.

According to Mohamed Reda, general manager of Lucky Tours, "Russians fly from Hurghada to Luxor by private helicopters, a trip which costs about \$4,000."

To cater to the Japanese, there are now large numbers of Japanese restaurants and guide books. Overtures are also being made to resume the Japan Airlines flight between Egypt and Japan, which would increase the flow of tourists and business travellers.

Australia is another market which has huge potential. An Egyptian Road Show to Australia brought together tourism officials, businesses and archaeologists to promote Egypt and inaugurate a new EgyptAir connection between Sydney and Cairo.

In addition, there was an effort to combine promotion and development. A new trend finds the owners of hotels and tourist villages establishing their own travel agencies, thereby controlling the marketing of their product both locally and abroad.

Foreign investment in tourist projects, enabling investors to attract tourists from their own countries, was strongly encouraged. Egypt has gained extensive experience both from these investments and the marketing opportunities they provide.

This year also has seen a marked continuation in promoting quality by the Ministry of Tourism. This applies not only to tourist services, but also to the efficiency of human resources within the industry as well as methods and techniques used.

Several ideas were tabled and adopted in resolutions this last year. They included encouraging charter flights to Egypt, accelerating the issuance of licenses to build hotels and other tourism establishments within the corridors of cities, ensuring that tourism development projects and investments are exempted from obligatory subscription in Hous-

ing Bonds, establishing a new airport at Marsa Alam on the Red Sea coast and creating wave barriers in some coastal regions.

In addition, strict and comprehensive plans are being made to upgrade medical-curative tourism, establish an integrated ambulance network and last, but by no means least, implement a national programme to increase public awareness of tourism through education, radio or television programmes.

The Ministry of Tourism's Mehrez, said that there is now a great deal of competition among investors who, having realised the importance of the tourism industry, are anxious to invest. The ministry evaluates potential investors and is very selective.

Two facts on the success of tourism speak for themselves. First, the number of tourists to Egypt increased to 3.5 million during the fiscal year 1995/1996, 25 per cent higher than the numbers for the previous year. This figure has never before been attained in the history of tourism in Egypt. Second, the volume of investment by the private sector in tourism development increased to the first eight months of 1996 by LE8.8 million.

Eco-reins on tourism boom

Protecting the environment from tourist trespasses was everyone's concern this year, reports Sherine Nasr

This year, serious efforts were made by the government and non-governmental organisations to protect the environment in areas of high tourist concentration. The main projects focused on the tourist areas in Sharm El-Sheikh, the various natural reserves in South Sinai and the coastal zones.

A joint Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) and European Union (EU) project declared the Egyptian coastline, south to the nation's borders with the Sudan, as protected areas. "This includes the territorial waters, the coral reefs and the sea life," said Michael Pearson, director of Ras Mohamed National Park.

Under the decision, filling in coastal reefs to create beaches and dumping sewage in the sea are strictly forbidden. Similar regulations to protect sea life in the national reserves will be applied.

Studies are now being conducted by the EEAA to designate more sites as protected areas. "Taba is one of them," said Pearson. The Taba area includes Wadi El-Gazala, Ein El-Hadra, Ein Um Ahmed and the coloured canyons of Sinai, all of which are rich in different ecosystems. "This will help protect the natural environment by establishing management procedures at each of the sites," he said.

St Catherine's Monastery, located in the south central area of the Sinai Peninsula, is now receiving long-awaited attention. A huge area, declared protected in 1987, is part of a network of parks, including Ras Mohamed, Abu Galum and Nabq. St Catherine's environment is characterised by a high-mountain ecosystem, a wealth of wild life and indigenous plants that are found nowhere else.

During last month's floods, the EEAA was quick to prevent tourists from entering Ras Mohamed National Park. "The park was blocked with water and vehicles could have destroyed it," Pearson explained. It was quickly opened up again.

Created in 1983 with a restricted area

of 97 sq km, Ras Mohamed has since grown to encompass an area of 480 sq km, within which strict environmental regulations are enforced.

"We have a scheduled diving system that allows for activity only five days a week and only at certain times during the day," said Pearson. Anchors are strictly forbidden and entrance to the diving area is restricted to designated access points. It is prohibited to drive off marked trails or to drive any motor vehicles whatsoever on all beaches. Deep-sea fishing is the only kind of fishing permitted, except for the local Bedouins. Violators are subject to prosecution.

Bedouin activities that are likely to damage natural habitats or reduce their bio-diversity are now regulated by EEAA staff in co-operation with concerned members of the community. "Some of the interested Bedouins have been hired as Park Rangers," said Pearson. The cutting of a "green tree" is strictly prohibited by tribal laws which govern the Bedouin communities in these areas.

As a floristic frontier, Abu Galum is a sensitive area which has received high priority. "Out of 165 plant species in the Sinai Peninsula, 44 species are seen only in this protectorate and they tend to increase in density towards central and northern Sinai," said Pearson. Access to regions without vehicle track systems can only be permitted where marked trails have been prepared. Bedouin guides and camels can be hired for travel within the area.

"A visitors' centre, located at the northern boundary of the protectorate, will soon open. Here visitors will be able to visit a small, audio-visual theatre that will concentrate on the flora and fauna of the protectorate," he said.

The main problem facing the Sinai is the large volume of floating garbage washing up on its shores. "Despite regular cleaning, the problem persists," said Pearson.

Academic institutions have also played an active part in preserving the environ-

ment of coastal areas. The Suez Canal University is now sponsoring a project, the first of its kind, to protect sea turtles, the main predators of jellyfish.

The guards along the coasts have been trained not to hunt them and to protect their nests and hatchlings. "This is perhaps the only effective and biologically sound means to eliminate the problem of the jellyfish," he said.

Jellyfish outbreaks have recently increased tremendously along the Mediterranean coasts of Alexandria, El-Arish and Rafah. They have also appeared in the canal cities of Port Said and Ismailia. "They caused a lot of inconvenience to holiday-makers and almost ruined the reputation of these local resorts," said Samir Ghoneim, dean of the Faculty of Fish Resources at Suez Canal University.

Another project to protect unique animal species on the verge of extinction is now being carried out at Wadi El-Rayan, a protected area in El-Fayoum. Five feddans have been allocated inside the protectorate to develop a man-made forest where the gazelle and a number of migratory birds can live out of harm's way. The area has been fenced and 12 kinds of pollutoo-combating trees have already been planted. The project is the result of a joint effort by a local non-governmental organisation and the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) for small enterprises.

A major public awareness campaign at Sharm El-Sheikh was conducted to seek the best means to protect flora and fauna of the Red Sea and the desert areas bordering it. Environmentalists, biologists, scuba diving instructors and beach-goers took part in the event. Participants went on field trips to areas which had sustained serious environmental damage. "We learned to reject requests by tourists to engage in activities that would ultimately ruin the environment," said Mohamed Ali, a hotel employee. "It was a fruitful event by the end of which I, and many of my colleagues, developed an awareness of the environment that we did not have before."

How to get there

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria

Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter, from the airport LE24 until 9pm; LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15pm. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matruh

Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36. Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE33. Cairo-Port Said Services every half hour from 6am to 8pm; then 9am, 10am, 3pm and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said

Service 6.45am, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada

Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada

Service 8pm, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to North/South Sinai, Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qalali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tahrir Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassia Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia

Services every 45 minutes from 6.15am to 6pm, from Qalali, then Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE57.5; air-conditioned bus LE52.5, one way.

Cairo-Suez

Services every half an hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qalali, then Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE57.5; air-conditioned bus LE52.5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish

Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qalali, then Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE57.5; air-conditioned bus LE52.5, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassia, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Noweha

Service 8am, from Abbassia, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada

Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safage

Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Oussir

Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor

Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan

Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan

"French" deluxe trains with sleepers. Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (travelling Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE120 for Egyptians; to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians. "Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers. Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria

"Tahiri" trains. VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal. Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 3pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.

"French" trains

Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772-610.

Cairo-Aswan

Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor

Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada

Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE896 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Seasonal deals

Holidays

Cairo

Movenpick Heliopolis
No special rates. On Christmas Eve, a dinner will be served in the Movenpick and Sarraya restaurants, a 4-course menu for LE79. In the Orangerie restaurant, dinner will be served from 6pm for LE75. Papillon Disco offers unique, all-night dancing, minimum charge LE45.

On Christmas Day, a 4-course menu will be served at the Movenpick and Sarraya restaurants for LE85. The Orangerie offers a buffet lunch from 11.30am to 6pm for LE68.

On New Year's Eve, a 6-course menu will be served for LE195 at the Movenpick and Sarraya restaurants. The Papillon Disco will also be offering a 3-course menu, along with entertainment and an English DJ for LE230. A party in the Les Reines Banquet Room will include a gala dinner buffet, a belly dancer and two DJs for LE236.

Ramsis Hilton
No special rates. Dinner will be served at the Citadel Grill for LE156. Smoked salmon, crispy roast duck, oxtail with cream and other specialties will be served. The deluxe menu will be LE159, and include smoked duck breast, Canadian lobster and other specialties.

In the Terrace Cafe, a rich buffet will be served with a variety of terrines and galanettes, duck liver and sliced smoked salmon, roasted veal loin, grilled lamb cutlets and other delicious plates.

On New Year's Eve, the Citadel Grill will offer two dinners for LE169 and LE182 respectively. Windows on the World restaurant, overlooking Cairo, will present a splendid show, including a belly dancer, Egyptian and international singers.

Hurghada
Sonesta beach resort. Special offer of LE133 per person per night, half board including taxes and service.

Sharm El-Sheikh
Sonesta beach resort. No special rates. A Christmas dinner will be served at the Citadel restaurant. Cookies, chocolates and special Christmas cakes will be sold.

Movenpick Sharm El-Sheikh
No special rates. On Christmas Eve, a Santa Claus Christmas Party will be held for children. Another will be held for adults at the Casca Disco. A special Christmas Day gala buffet will be held at the Orangerie restaurant.

On New Year's Eve, a big test will be erected for entertainment, including belly dancing, Russian shows and variety of singers.

On New Year's Day, a camel race will be organised, followed by a buffet lunch in the desert.

Novotel Sharm El-Sheikh
No special rates. On Christmas Eve, a special party for children will be held at the swimming pool. Presents will be distributed. Another party will be organised for adults by the seaside. A test will be erected for entertainment which will include dancing, shows and bands.

New Year's Eve, a party will be held around the swimming pool. It will feature belly dancing, aqua ballet and an oriental band.

Ghazala Hotel
On Christmas Eve, a gala buffet dinner will be served in the main restaurant with traditional delicacies, live entertainment and shows. Another gala dinner will be offered at Kokoi restaurant including a 6-course menu of traditional Western and Far Eastern specialties for LE180.

On Christmas Day, a special party for children will be held at the Ghazala Beach Bar for LE15 per child including a magic show, Santa Claus and distribution of presents.

On New Year's Eve, the Kokoi restaurant will feature a gala dinner with 6 courses for LE240. At the Beach Bar a special party will be set up with a LE40 minimum charge.

Travel agencies:
Karnak
Special trips to Beirut, Lebanon LE1310 for five days, including airfare and accommodation in a four-star hotel.

Compiled by Rehab Saad

EGYPT AIR

Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:

Abu Simbel Sales Office:	33436-334735
Alexandria Office: Ramsis	483337-483778
Giza:	586341-586343
Airport Office:	4218464-422788-428237-428193
Aswan Office:	315900/1/2/3/4
Airport Office:	488367-488588
Assiut Office:	333551-322711-324000-329487
Mansoura Office:	363976-363733
Hurghada Office:	443891/4
Airport Office:	442883-443597
Ismailia Office:	328357-221958-221951/2-328356
Luxor Office:	388380/1/2/3/4
Airport Office:	388367/8
Luxor Office Karnak:	382360
Marsa Matruh Office:	934398
Menoufia Office (Sheikh El Koun):	233362-233525-233522
New Valley Office:	868/96465
Port Said Office:	224128-222878-228921
Port Said Office Karnak:	238335-239970
Sharm El Sheikh Office:	686314-686489
Airport Office:	686488
Taba Office:	686/530010-530011
Direct:	5783628
Tanta Office:	311758/311788
Zakazik Office:	348829-349838/1

Noble steed and silent desert



Photographer **Sherif Sonbol** captures an Arabian horse at Saqqara, while **Jilli Kamil** describes the history of the celebrated steed in Egypt

The Arabian horse has remained practically unchanged throughout the more than 3,500 years of the breed's history. The beauty and grace of these magnificent, selectively bred creatures, are unsurpassed. Every Arabian owner will tell you that there is a spiritual bond and kinship between the Arabian horse and its owner such as exists with no other breed.

Horses are depicted on Ancient Egyptian memorial scarabs; many a pharaoh is depicted in a battle scene pursuing the enemy from his chariot drawn by horses in rearing position; under the

banner of Islam, the Arab horse reached its peak of glory, a steed of the desert to be revered as a sacred animal, a providential instrument of war.

Today the horse is an integral part of Egyptian life. Horse racing is, and has been, a favourite pastime among the inhabitants of the Nile Valley for centuries. Breeding and training of the most select horses are encouraged. Arab horse festivals are held annually.

Yet, despite the long history of the Arabian horse in Egypt, how and when Egyptians obtained it remains an enigma. Many scholars thought that it was brought into Egypt with

the Hyksos, around 1786 BC. But when, in 1959, the British scholar Walter Emery — well known for his search for the tomb of Imhotep, builder of Zoser's Step Pyramid at Saqqara and venerated much later as a god of medicine — unearthed the skeleton of a horse in Bubien in the Sudan, he believed it dated from the end of the Middle Kingdom and would therefore predate the Hyksos.

Does it really matter? These noble, desert steeds are a living link with the past. The magnificent docile creature, here captured at sunset as it stands at the edge of the Western Desert which covers more than two-thirds of the whole of

Egypt, is a descendant of the famous Arabians of antiquity. The Egyptian Museum houses a collection of magnificent ancient horse trappings discovered in the royal tombs in Ballana and Qustul in Nubia in 1931. One tomb contained the skeletons of six horses which had been sacrificed along with their groom in the fourth century BC. They were adorned with jeweled silver bridles, bits attached to the headstall by hinged brackets in the form of seated lions, reins of silver rope chains, and lion-headed medallions of beaten silver with eyes inlaid with lapis lazuli, and protruding tongue of carved ivory.

Authentique

In a meeting with Mr. Moenis El-Naggar, marketing director for KH Marketing and Retail Services, the company which owns the best gift shop in town, Authentique, he stated that "here at Authentique we bring you the finest European and American brand names all together under one roof."

"Our shop is especially designed to fulfill the needs of those who wish to lavish themselves with exquisite items and pay particular attention to quality."

"Not only do we guarantee the quality of our collection, which is all accompanied by original certificates, but we also guarantee a gift that would neither be forgotten or lost. Your choice of a gift is a very personal expression and because of that we offer you an impressive selection of distinguished items that are precious, distinguished and elegant. Shop with us... we shop the world to personally select the finest gifts for you."

Two months of discoveries

Royal tomb

ARCHAEOLOGISTS from Zagazig University discovered a royal tomb in Tel-Basta, north of Cairo. It dates back to the pyramid builders in 2600 BC. The walls are decorated with reliefs, and a mummified body covered with gold leaf was found inside, along with canopic jars, pottery, a marble offering table and an artist's palette.

The Zagazig archaeologists said that the owner of the tomb is still unknown but that it is a unique discovery in Tel-Basta. The city, sacred to the cat goddess Bastet, was home to extensive animal burials, but this is the first unearthed human tomb.

Clay sarcophagi

CONSTRUCTION workers

accidentally came across a Pharaonic tomb, complete with clay sarcophagi, while digging the foundations of a garage in the Cairo district of Helmet El-Zeitoun.

Studies carried out by archaeologists of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) have revealed that it dates back 2,000 years and contains four empty sarcophagi inscribed with hieroglyphics, along with some clay utensils. A sweep of the residential district is being carried out to see if there are any more antiquities in the area.

Salaheddin's dock

THE EGYPTIAN mission working at the Pharaoh's Island in the Gulf of Aqaba has excavated military buildings,

forts and citadels, which date back to the era of Salaheddin.

The discovery has historical importance because the lake found within the island fortress was a military dock for Salaheddin's boats during his wars against the Crusaders.

Pharaonic citadel

AN EGYPTIAN-Argentinian mission working at Qantara Star, in Sinai, has discovered a Pharaonic citadel on the "Road of Horus" which linked Egypt with western Asia. It dates back to the New Kingdom and its huge gates are constructed of mud-brick.

Mohamed Abdel-Maqoud, director general of North Sinai antiquities, said that this citadel is depicted in Seti I's shrine in the Great Court of Karnak Temple in Luxor.

Along the same ancient highway, the Egyptian-Argentinian mission unearthed another Pharaonic fortress which also goes back to the New Kingdom. It was constructed by Ramses II.

structed by Ramses II.

Graeco-Roman

A FISHERMAN found a piece of Graeco-Roman pottery in his fishing net while casting in the Mediterranean, 25 miles north of Port-Said.

Made of red clay, 53cm in circumference, with two decorative handles, the vessel is ornamented with colored paintings and engravings showing marine animals. It is now on display in the pottery hall of Port Said Museum.

Jewellery box

AN EGYPTIAN construction worker found a jewellery box decorated with unique and colourful engravings while digging the foundations of a house built in the old Kamuz area of Alexandria.

It dates to the year 1255 of the Islamic calendar Al-Hejra. The box is now at the Alexandria museum for documentation and will later be transferred to the Islamic Museum in Cairo.

Pharaonic temple

AN EGYPTIAN-British mission has discovered a Pharaonic temple at Tel-El-Balamoun in Damietta. It dates to the New Kingdom and was built by Nektanebo, the founder of the 30th dynasty and the last Egyptian king before the invasion of Egypt by Alexander the Great.

Compiled by
Nervine El-Aref

Golden Pyramids Plaza Company

Announces its decision of putting to tender Phase One of its touristic mixed use complex, in Nasr City - Cairo, with a total built up area of approximately 750,000 m2 to be constructed in two phases.

Due to size and complexity of First Phase, the works are split into two major disciplines, first concrete structure, and second architectural, electro-mechanical, and finishing works.

Each of the two major disciplines will be tendered in four packages as follows:

1. Shopping center with a built up area of about 220,000 m2.
2. Five star 600 room Hotel with a built up area of about 84,000m2.
3. Two blocks of hotel apartments and residence with a built up area of about 78,000 m2.
4. Three blocks of residential and office with a built up area of about 110,000 m2.

Pre-qualified contractors may participate in the tender of all or any of the above packages.

Interested general contractors, who have not submitted their qualifications previously, are now invited to submit their qualification documents before January 5, 1997 which should include:

- A. List of similar projects constructed or currently under construction.
- B. Names, addresses and telephone numbers of clients, consultants, certificates of completion, and bank references.
- C. Organization chart and resume of key personnel.
- D. List of equipment.
- E. Audited Financial statements for the last three years.
- F. Any other document which may be pertinent.

Tender of first discipline of Phase One will be announced in third week of January, the second discipline in the third week of February 1997, and phase two latest in November 1997.

Excavation, shoring and ground improvement are already in progress.

Pre-qualification documents should be sent to the following address:

El Fardos Tower - Apt. 14 - Melsa Housing Bldg. 30 - Nasr City - 11341 Cairo

Tel:202-4145771,3 Fax:4145772

Kamel Melek Magga

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1925 - 1996

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IMPERIAL AIRWAYS/BRITISH AIRWAYS -
70 YEARS SERVICE TO EGYPT**



On 26 December 1926, with great ceremony, the British Secretary of State for Air, Sir Samuel Hoare and a party of VIPs were flown from London arriving at Abulor in December 1926, where they were received by the Governor of Alexandria. Sir Samuel Hoare was inaugurating an air service to India, with Egypt as a key point. The aircraft used for this inaugural flight was a De Havilland DH66 Hercules with accommodation for 7 passengers in addition to a full load of mail. Even before this inaugural flight, two other Hercules had positioned to Heliopolis arriving on 24 December to inaugurate the Desert Air Mail service on 26 December 1926. In 1927, flying between the United Kingdom and Egypt was not as straightforward as it is today. Passengers were flown via Paris to Basle, then they disembarked and boarded train for Genoa/Italy where a 15 seater flying boat waited to fly them in easy stages along the Mediterranean to Alexandria.

engineering workshop became a main repair centre which in one month alone services 250 aircraft. The 21 seater Avro 685 was on service from London to Cairo via Morocco. Dakotas linked Cairo with Algiers, AW27 carried up to 40 passengers from Cairo to Calcutta and Lockheed 14 seater flew weekly from Cairo to Karachi. By 1947 BOAC departures per week from Cairo. In 1972 BOAC and British European Airways were merged to form what is now known as British Airways.

In 1986 - after 70 years services to Egypt - and as a response from British Airways towards the development of tourism and investment in the country, the Company introduced the state of art - Boeing 777 on the daily London/Cairo route. But demand continued to increase and in November 1996 the Boeing 747 was introduced. This aircraft has high passenger appeal and is already breaking all previous traffic records between Cairo and London. British Airways motto may be old but it will always be valid: "to fly to serve".

Time passing by, in 1940 British Overseas Airways Corporation was formed and took over Imperial Airways. By 1944 BOAC employed 2000 engineers at Almaz. The Heliopolis



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1996: Mixed bag of sports

1996, was a vintage year of sorts for Egyptian sports at home and abroad. **Inas Mazhar** reviews the sports scene of the past year which witnessed a large number events on the national, regional and international levels

Throughout 1996, Egyptian athletes spanned the globe in search of the sometimes elusive dream of winning accolades as they strove to reach the pinnacle of excellence in their sport. For many it was *annus horribilis* — the Olympic delegation for example — as they fell short of the expectations, set for or by themselves, of fame and personal development. But for others, 1996 marked the beginnings of recognition in sporting lore, while for the established names it was a continuation of their commitment to the ideal.

On the home front Egyptian sports officials organised several regional and international sporting events which attracted top athletes to the country. Al-Ahram Organisation, for its part, sponsored the 1st Al-Ahram International Handball Tournament and the 1st Al-Ahram International Squash Championship at the Pyramids of Giza which was followed by the Gezira, Helipolis and the African senior championships. Other regional tournaments hosted by Egypt included basketball and volleyball championships which, while less successful for the home talent, were nonetheless well received.

International tennis made a comeback, after a more than 15-year hiatus, under the bright lights of the Gezira Sporting Club's main court. The final matches of the 74th Egyptian International Tennis Championships concluded with the Brazilian Fernando Meligeni defeating the Spaniard Alberto Berasategui to claim the trophy.

Egypt's sporting record for the year was on the whole mixed. But still in the spirit of true sportsmanship, the winners not-so-graciously flaunted their achievements while the losers and fans, of course, were magnanimous in defeat.

Some of the year's outstanding accomplishments were realised from unexpected quarters such as the athletes competing at the Paralympics in Atlanta. They achieved more than just excellence on the field. The disabled athletes earned the respect of the people as they presented Egypt with 30 medals including 8 gold, 11 silver and 11 bronze.

The shot-putters were an international sensation. For the first time in Paralympic history three athletes from the same country captured all the medals of the women's shot-put event.

In squash, Egypt had a fruitful season which started in March when favourite son, squash champion Ahmed Barada won the French open. Barada, bested Englishman Nicholas Taylor

3-0 in an 80-minute final. In May, Egypt dominated the first all African squash championship which was held in the Cairo Stadium courts. In the thrilling final game of the tournament, 19-year-old Barada defeated his former coach Amir Wagih. Likewise, the women's final was an all-Egyptian encounter between *Sahar Shabana* and *Maha Zein*, who surprisingly defeated Shabana and won the title.

Later in the year Barada put on a tremendous performance in the portable glass court at the 1st Al-Ahram International Squash Championship before he was forced to give way to world champion Jansher Khan of Pakistan, who clinched the title with a 3-0 victory.

Ahmed Faizy fulfilled the hopes of his fans, and the expectations of the tournament organisers, who had seeded him number one, when he secured the individual junior world championship title. He bested Australia's Stewart Boswell 3-1 in a breathtaking match at the Cairo Stadium.

Egypt, however, was pushed into second place by England in the team event at the World Squash Championship in Cairo. The English team, whose members had all been defeated by the Egyptian players in the individual event, took their revenge on the defending champion team, beating them 2-1. Pakistan took third, while Switzerland nabbed fourth.

To round off the season, Egypt's younger athletes swept the board in the Arab Junior Championships in Saudi Arabia.

The handballers began the year in Sweden, where they bounced into fourth place in the 7th Handball World Cup after six days of stiff competition between eight of the world's best teams.

In April, the Egyptian national junior handball team took second place in the four-day-long African championship held in Cairo. The hosts came in behind Tunisia and were followed by Algeria in third place.

In the run-up to the Atlanta Olympics and in front of thousands of spectators at the Cairo Stadium indoor halls, the Russian handball team narrowly defeated the Egyptian squad to be crowned champions of the 1st Al-Ahram International Handball Tournament.

At the Atlanta Games, — although they failed to win any medals — the handball team's sixth place slot was the sole remarkable achievement among the Egyptian delegation.

In sports as team effort, Ahli Club led the way by winning the first Arab Champions Cup held in Tunisia. But Ahli wasn't alone in achieving good results in team competitions in championships.

Just when everyone thought that luck had abandoned the national taekwon do team, the 16 member delegation returned home from the world cup in Brazil with one gold medal, two silvers and a bronze.

The juniors and seniors African weightlifting championships, which took place in Esmatla, attracted over 176 weightlifters from 11 countries. Egypt swept the mat in both events with Algeria trailing behind in second place.

Egypt's national team travelled the competition underdog at the 15th Arab Table Tennis Championship. The squad effortlessly swept the matches 3-0 to secure the gold medals in competitions pitting them against teams from 15 countries.

Ahli football team, in brilliant form, grabbed the title of the 12th Arab Champions Cup at the Cairo Stadium. Ahli defeated Raga of Morocco 3-1 in the final of the tournament.

The 5-a-side football players, recalling their salad days, showed all the right stuff as they represented Egypt at the African qualification for the 3rd World 5-a-side African qualifications in Cairo. The team won the title and qualified for the world cup finals in Spain in November. The three-month-old team of retired football pros were eliminated during the first round by the more experienced stars of the game.

The unbeatable Shargia hockey team were re-crowned in Hama at the African Clubs Championship for the ninth consecutive time. Their triumph was made all the sweeter as they set a record by becoming the first team to win a continental title nine times in a row.

The Egyptian national speedball team captured the 11th World Speedball Championship trophy in Belgium ahead of France in second and Austria in third place.



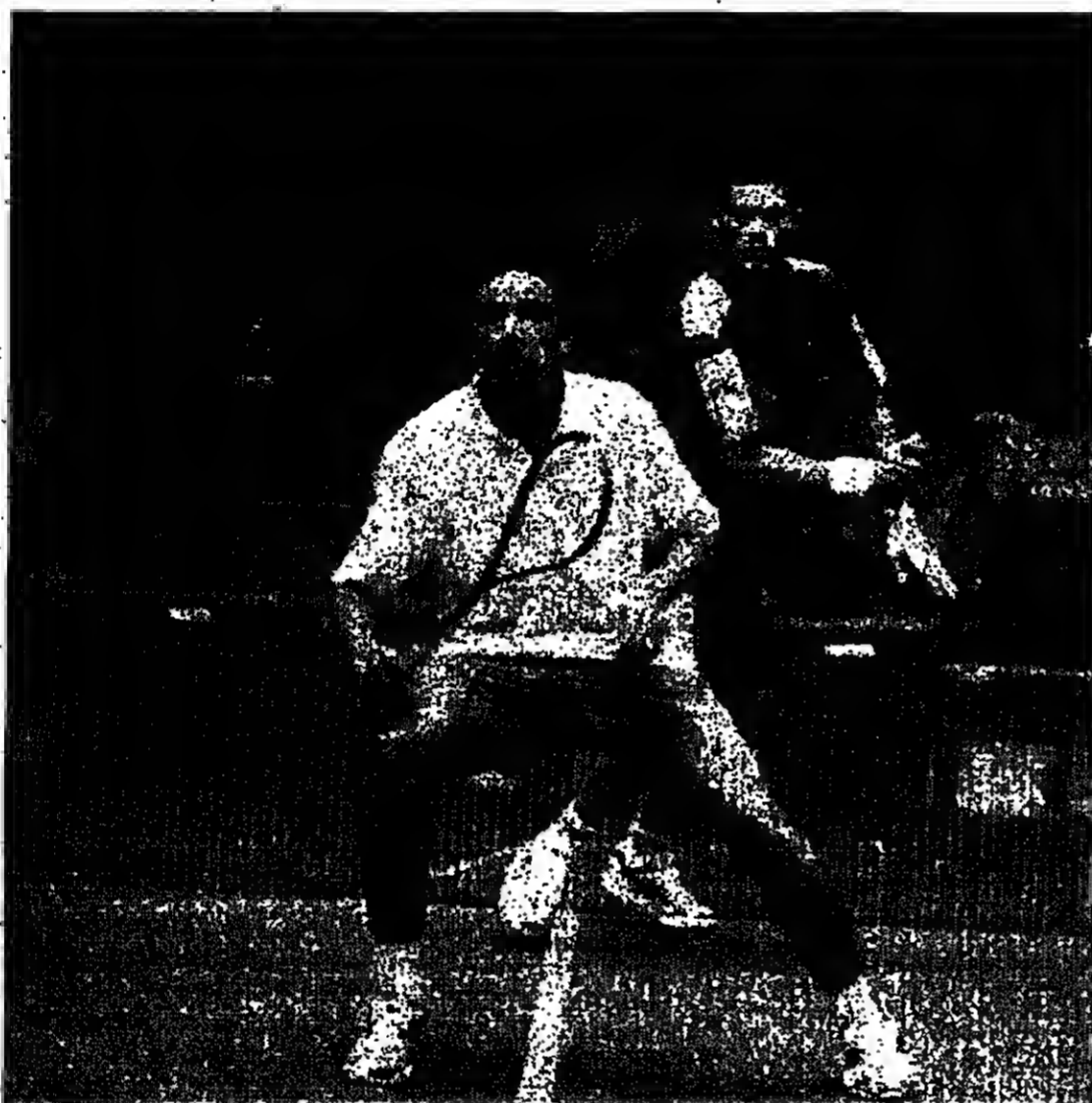
Barada best of all

EGYPT'S top ranked squash player, Ahmed Barada, was chosen Egyptian 1996 athlete of the year in a poll of 30 sports officials conducted by *Al-Ahram Weekly* at the year end. Barada, who has enjoyed a dramatic year, chalked up 25 votes, just ahead of runner-up, African champion parrman, Ali Ibrahim who received 22 votes.

The 19 year-old's selection marks the third year running that he has been named the number one athlete in surveys conducted by Egyptian media organisations and sports bodies.

Barada was favoured for his outstanding results and performances — as detailed in the accompanying article — throughout a year in which, exceeding all expectations, he was able to improve on his already high playing standard. The 1994 world junior champion's top of the year ranking of no 37 rose to no 8 by year's end according to the latest Professional Squash Association (PSA) rankings issued two weeks ago.

"I am very proud to be selected as Egypt's top athlete for this year," said an overwhelmed Barada upon hearing the news. "I owe it all to my father who has stood with me despite his illness and heart surgery. I know that his prayers were always with me." "Special thanks must also be extended to my sponsor Ibrahim Kamel," Barada continued, "And to all those who selected me, I promise that I will continue playing my best to raise my and my country's name to the heights of squash prominence."



A few of the past year's most exciting moments in Egyptian sports, from the court, the mat and field are reflected above

Photos: Al-Ahram

Egypt's gymnastics delegation moved to the rhythm and returned from the third African Rhythmic Gymnastics Championship in Namibia after triumphing in both the junior and senior events. The teams tallied up a total of 23 medals: 12 gold, 7 silver and 4 bronze.

Taking the title away from their opponents at the Arab Weightlifting Championship in Beirut, the Egyptian weightlifting team won 26 medals: 22 gold, 3 bronze and one silver.

The Gezira Sporting Club sized up the competition and captured the 15th African Basketball Championships Cup for the second year running.

The 7th Arab Junior Wrestling Championship, held at the Cairo Stadium, was skillfully dominated by Egypt. The Egyptian team, with 20 wrestlers, panned down first place in the Greco-Roman and free wrestling events, collecting 13 gold medals and seven silver medals.

With an impressive performance, the Egyptian

bodybuilding team was crowned co-winner with Germany at the World Bodybuilding Championship in Jordan.

Arch-rivals Ahli and Zamalek succeeded in making the 15th African Volleyball Clubs Championship in Johannesburg an Egyptian event as they faced off in the tournament's final. The Ahli team came home victorious with their third tournament title, defeating Zamalek 3-0 in an all-out battle in the final.

With a 4-0 victory over Zaire's Soudigraf, Arab Contractors football team snatched the African Cup Winners Cup for the third time in the club's history. Zamalek continued Egypt's continental domination by winning the African Champions Cup after a 2-2 penalty shoot-out against Nigeria's Shooting Stars.

Egyptian boxers collected five gold medals and 35 points, to win the 4th International Boxing Championship in Cairo. The seven day champion-

ship had 92 boxers from 17 Arab, African and European countries in competition.

Mustafa Khalil accomplished something anyone would be proud of achieving. He became the first disabled swimmer to complete the French international race and snatched first place from 37 able-bodied swimmers who took part in the 25km race in the process.

Others on the list of stand-out athletes of the year include Anwar El-Amawy who won the world body building bantam-weight title and Sayed Abu Midan, winner of the bronze medal in the under-78kg weight category in the World Judo Championship. Karate Kid Karim Fikry won Germany's Under-15 International Karate Championship title.

We'd probably like to forget it, but the 1996 roundup of events wouldn't be complete without mention of the less than inspiring showing of Egyptian athletes at the Atlanta Olympics. Although the Egyptian delegation was slashed to 29 athletes, in-

cluding 16 members of the handball team, and despite the strict criteria by which the athletes were chosen, Egypt still failed to triumph among the winning countries. The only noteworthy results came from the handball team and oarsman Ali Ibrahim who placed eighth in his event.

In the aftermath of the dismal outcome — there had been great expectations — Prime Minister Kamel El-Ganzouri was named head of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports.

The prime minister quickly moved to restore equilibrium and formulate a plan for Egyptian sports. The election of a new board of directors for the sports federations as well as the National Olympic Committee bodes well for the coming years. Egyptian sports bodies, under El-Ganzouri, are hard at work preparing for upcoming events, including the Arab Games, the Mediterranean Games, the Francophone Games and the most important of them all — the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

Abdel-Hamid Badawi:

Table talk

Only he knows for sure what your Christmas goose has been through on its way to your plate

A spicy smell wafts through the enormous kitchen hall. A semi-circle of chefs, all dressed in white uniforms and mushroom-like hats, press tightly around a tall man, his head bowed to the polished stainless steel on the stove. It smells good.

"Good, very tender and juicy...What if we thicken the sauce a little bit?" come the comments. The tall chef listens intently, trying to look indifferent and business-like. But there is a gleam in his eye. He is obviously proud of the result.

He is also proud to be the first and probably the only local chef to manage the kitchen of one of Egypt's largest five-star hotels.

Local chefs are by no means a rare phenomenon in Egypt. Sadly, however, very few make it to "the top", which for Egyptian chefs has never meant more than managing kitchens of four-star hotels and small touristic villages, 250 rooms at most. So, while the steak *au poivre* and crepe with chocolate sauce that you order in a five-star hotel cafeteria may well have been prepared by an Egyptian chef, it is always a German, Swiss, Dutch or other foreign executive chef who has set the menu, determined the ingredients, and designed the garnish for your dish.

Being the first Egyptian to savour the fruits of success in professional cooking, chef Badawi can afford to wallow in pride. But he is also well-equipped. He holds a bachelor's degree in hotel management, which he obtained in 1978 from Brugg University in Italy. He worked for four years in the kitchens of a four-star hotel in South Italy, and two restaurants in Rome.

Since he returned to Egypt in 1982, he has been working for five-star hotels and is now executive chef — the highest post in hotel cookery — of the local branch of one of the biggest five-star chains of hotels worldwide. He is fluent in Italian and speaks good English. And, at only 42, he has created a whole world of dishes hot and cold, sweet and spicy, light and rich.

He is still amazed. "I never dreamed that the success I would one day achieve as a professional would be in cooking." True enough, until the age of 20, Abdel-Hamid Badawi lived a conventional enough life for a young man in Cairo, working his way up routinely through Cairo University's Faculty of Arts. From a heavily disciplined home, with three brothers, Abdel-Hamid learned at an early age how to make his bed, clean his room — and, eventually, how to cook his supper every now and then.

What was once drudgery became a treat as he discovered that his friends relished the snacks that he prepared for them as they studied together for their *Thanawiya Amma* degrees. "Some of them even said I cooked better than their mothers," he recalls with a shy smile.

At that time, one of his older brothers, who was studying hotelery in Italy, persuaded him to shelve his literature books for a while and try his hand at class cuisine. The brother is still in Italy and now owns a well-known Middle Eastern restaurant in Rome. Medicine or engineering, maybe; but cooking? Had his father, Abdel-Hamid Badawi Sr., not been a movie actor at the time, with a respect for talent and art — whether on screen or

in the kitchen — Badawi's career choice might have been more difficult to swallow. Still, he never gave up his first major and, taking his literature books with him to Italy, was able to return to Cairo every year to sit for his examinations. He finally obtained his BA in Oriental languages in 1973, adding humanities credentials to his career in cuisine.

Chef Badawi's position now is a far cry from the young novice who spent the early years of his career lugging meat containers into the kitchens and juggling piles of vegetables. Supervising eight kitchens, he manages kitchen heads, assistant chefs, cooks, apprentices, accountants and support staff. He has an air-conditioned office, complete with potted plants, a small library of gourmet books, samples of imported goodies, and a bilingual secretary.

With all these amenities, it is easy to mistake chef Badawi for a culinary technocrat. In fact, he rarely cooks. With so many fabulously mouths to feed in the hotel and a tight daily schedule, he barely has time to whip up new dishes. He is the complete opposite of the stereotypical image of the elderly, red-faced, boisterous chef, wielding enormous ladles and tossing ingredients in the air. He is tall, lean, soft-spoken, and exceedingly bashful.

But Badawi has innate skills that would make first-impression sceptics eat their words. He can detect the different ingredients in a dish surrounded by other platters on a banquet table. "I can tell if somebody's kitchen is clean and whether or not the cook is professional by the way they cut their cucumbers and garnish their salads," he boasts.

Most of all, Badawi is meticulous about food. To him, it is not simply a matter of mixing animal with vegetable, then chewing them into extinction. "Cooking is not only an art," he says, "it is a science."

But where is the science in a plate of spaghetti? Apparently, in the world of professional cooking, one needs a basic knowledge of anatomy, economics, botany, veterinary sciences, and chemistry. Computer science skills are also an asset. For Badawi, professional cooking is as diverse as a pizza: the greater the variety of knowledge ingredients you add, the greater the satisfaction. "In Italy, we studied anatomy in great depth, because a proper chef must know how the food is digested, how it benefits each internal organ and, most importantly, the harmful effects of unclean food on the body," Badawi is obsessed with hygiene: "bacterial prevention" is an expression frequently used in his culinary conversations.

"We [chefs] have to know a little bit about veterinary sciences, to be aware of the methods of rearing and feeding, animal diseases and other things that may affect cooked meat, and the same thing applies to vegetables and botany," he says. "To manage the kitchen, I have to know about market prices when I buy my supplies, to maximise profit without compromising on taste or quantities. Our inventory and accounting system is computerised and also under my supervision, so I have to know computers as well to be able to monitor their work. We have all kinds of machinery for tasks such



as dish-washing, dough-kneading and refrigerating, and I have to know their capacities and methods of operation."

Evidently, versatility is a key ingredient. But theoretical knowledge aside, the real test is the kitchen table and stove — and here, Badawi feels at ease. "I love to experiment with food," he says. "It is the thing I enjoy most about cooking. I like to combine ingredients that have come from different sources: something from the sea, another from the land, a third from animals, and so on. When I do this, taste is not the only thing that I think about. Harmony of colours is also important. It's a lot of fun, allows for enormous creativity, and can be very rewarding at the end."

True enough, the menus are titillating. The odd fillet and chicken breast are still dominant, but fruit and cheese sauces, and an assortment of local and imported spices, are welcome additions. In experimenting with new dishes, Badawi does not merely toss a potpourri of ingredients into the pot and hope for the best. "It's like sculpting," he says. "You have to know your ingredients and get a feel for them before you work with them." Fastidious with his own cooking, he is apt to reject three attempts before passing the final result, which then undergoes the "customer test". (What a waste! Untouched dishes are donated to two non-governmental organisations.)

Harmonising disparate and exotic ingredients is Badawi's specialty. Yet, he cannot afford complacency for too long. Career cooking is competitive. With styles of cooking and varieties of food varying between countries, cities, villages and even neighbourhoods, learning and experience are limitless.

To complicate matters, even simple dishes are riding the technology wave. Keeping up with new changes and fierce

competition can be daunting — or stimulating. Badawi himself admits that his skills never seem to match those of other chefs in certain specialisations. "Take Indian food, for instance," he says. "It depends almost entirely on mixing a whole range of herbs and spices in a delicate balance that only Indian chefs can master."

But even back home, some dishes are not to be taken lightly. "I believe that no one can make a *molokhia* and rabbit dish better than the traditional Egyptian housewife," he states. Even simple material like flour can be very tricky. Depending on where it is grown, the type of wheat planted, and how finely it is ground, flour can vary in its reaction to water, heat and humidity, and a lot of bakery items are affected by this. Specialising in Italian food, where pastries and pastas are the stars of the menu, Badawi perceives this as a challenge: he is always willing to make several tries before "I begin to feel the flour". (Remembering the old days when he couldn't get the right balance of water for cooking rice properly, his face breaks into a distant, wistful grin.)

Indeed, bashful as he may seem, Badawi thrives on challenge in his work. He specialises in cold foods, especially appetizers, salads, cold meats, and decoration. To master this category is no piece of cake, he claims — but therein lies the sweetest challenge. Evidently, Chef Badawi is proud of his work. Working 12 hours a day, six days a week and spending as many as three consecutive days in the hotel's kitchens during high season, he shows no signs of protest. "I love my job because it is special. Cooking requires a lot of sense. It takes talent and ex-

perience to know when to turn the flame higher or lower when you broil chicken, the size of the pan to use and when to add the other ingredients." Subtleties like these, he claims, distinguish the competent chef from the short-order cook.

Yet he admits that his feelings are not shared by other chefs, especially the younger here-for-a-quick-buck variety. Cooking, after all, can be a lucrative field of employment. Still, many graduates find this line of work demeaning. Lack of enthusiasm and dedication not only affect the quality of the food, but are the reasons why Badawi has few competitors among his compatriots. Perfunctory work can keep a good cook cooking, but it can never make a *chef de cuisine*.

Badawi tries to fight this lack of motivation by employing as many "green graduates" as he can and molding them into professionals through unconventional learning methods. Thus, to be accepted in Badawi's kitchen, for instance, a beginner must hand in a research paper on a culinary topic along with his soufflé. Promotion is also based on innovation and contribution.

Badawi also encourages team spirit and

competition. Sparing the rod on subordinates, he stimulates them with interesting activities, the most popular of which are competitions held every quarter for innovation in recipes and decoration.

With so much food in his life, Badawi eats sparingly, sometimes forgetting meals altogether. His world-weary appetite is only seduced by new and exotic recipes. His favourite food: fish.

He never cooks at home. He prefers his wife's cooking, and has even learned a few recipes, like *molokhia* with shrimps, from her. He chuckles softly as he recalls the "experiments" she tried on him during their first years of marriage when she was a novice at cooking. Yet he vehemently denies the "best-chefs-in-the-world-are-men" assumption. "Women will always be the best chefs in the world in their homes, because they satisfy their families," he says.

Badawi's own special trick? The *marinades* so familiar to Egyptian cuisine. With this secret weapon, he has Egyptianised many international dishes at the hotel. Ever heard of marinating chop suey? Apparently, nothing is impossible.

Profile by Hanaa Radwan

الشركة القابضة للإسكان والسياحة والسينما شركة مصر للصوت والضوء

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- 3- Offers must be submitted in two separated envelopes (one to the technical part and the other for the financial one) till the tender opening date on 25/2/1997 at 12 O'clock A.M. Cairo time at the head office of Misr Company Giza - Pyramids. Proof of satisfactory competition of similar projects must be included in the offer.
- 4- Offers received after the due date mentioned in clause 3 or not accompanied by a bid bond will not be considered.

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١- تسحب كراسة الشروط والمواصفات من مقر الشركة بميدان أبو الهول السياحي مقابل مبلغ ألف وخمسمائة دولار أمريكي للنسخة الواحدة نقداً أو بشيك مقبول الدفع باسم الشركة.

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Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris



Christmas celebrations at the German school

With Christmas almost upon us, one has to think of presents. I don't know about you, but I prefer the presents I get to those I give. And, since I no longer like "surprises" — people are so predictable these days, I may end up with three computers and a dozen cellular phones — I hint delicately... I only wear Chanel to bed... I like the feel of platinum on my wrist... There is a woman who sells Yves St Laurent knick-knacks... I try not to be too esoteric however. I am not about to forget the year I was going on about belonging to the RSPCA and not wanting dead animals on my back... My friends presented me with a darling little kitten. Having seven cats busy scratching my sofas, I tried to tell them that this was not exactly what I had been hinting at, when I said that I liked something that roared. They however adamantly refused to exchange their present for the red Mercedes I had been coveting. This year, as I was telling you, I will do my best to avoid such unfortunate misunderstandings.

How lovely to be young in the festive season! Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to play we go... Not quite the dwarves words, of course, but this time of year I prefer my revised version, really, what with the carol singing, the parties and the presents... Who would want to go to work! And speaking of carol singing, I have been gargling like mad with lemon and honey this week as Engineer Maged Adel has begged me to join my crystalline falsetto to the voices of his choir, the Better Life Team, who were performing in the open air at Swissotel Al-Salam, on Monday 23 December, at the Helipolis Movement on Tuesday 24 December and indoors at the World Trade Center on Wednesday 25 December. Let me tell you dears, this group is not only the Better Life Team, it is the best I have heard in years. Did you see me dears, I was wearing a boa around my neck — the rage in London this season — para pa para pa...

And as a curtain raiser to more festivities, I attended the Christmas celebrations at the German School in Dokki. The air was so thick with the Christmas spirit that before stepping in one of the classrooms I stopped briefly to shake snowflakes off my (Dior) tunic. The dear little tots had decorated the whole classroom and Santa was looking on from his perch not a day older than when I used to draw him myself. I decided to treat the little darlings and their teacher to one of my famous renditions of "I dream of a white Christmas..." one of Bing's favourites.

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57 Giza Street

Over looking botanic garden, the Zoo and the River Nile.

Units of Different areas for all Purposes and activities
(Embassies - Companies - Offices - Clinics - etc.)

Surprise

Pay 15%
and have it immediately
the rest to be paid on monthly
installment basis for
10 years
interest free

Site visit is available 10 am - 4 pm daily
Auction will take place on Saturday 28/12/96
12 noon at the property market
8 Ibrahim Naguib St. - Garden City
terms of sale to be requested at the site 57 Giza st.
next to El Gamaa bridge for L.E. 50

Estimator Omar Toson